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*FAITH'S PERPLEXITIES*

'*They used helps, undergirding the ship.*'

ACTS xxvii. 17.

# FAITH'S PERPLEXITIES

BY

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TO

MY FATHER

FOR FIFTY YEARS A MINISTER

AND WITNESS TO THE

TRUTH

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# PREFACE

THE purpose of the following chapters is not so much to refute the arguments of the opponents of the Christian Faith with a view to winning their adherence to it, as to reassure the minds of those who already believe. Among the latter there are many, especially earnest young men and women, who, amid the strife of tongues, become perplexed. Their sympathies are all with Christ and His religion, but they do not feel sure how much they can hold fast as the truth, which there is no legitimate ground for questioning. They are assailed by uneasiness and nameless fears, owing to the assurance and self-confident airs of assailants. They do not know that, in spite of that self-confidence, there is far stronger ground for confidence on the part of those who adhere to Christ. The weight of sound scholarship, of mature judgment, of high character, of common sense, is all on His side. The attacks of Unbelief, however plausible,

are often made on most unwarranted assumptions, and have really failed to touch the matters that are of chief importance to the spiritual life. Christianity does not need simply to stand on the defensive. It can carry the war into the enemy's camp, and show the flimsiness of his pretensions. It has often done itself injustice by taking attacks upon it of a paltry kind too seriously, and by being content to parry assault. In its anxiety to conciliate and to reach common ground it has at times shown an excessive readiness to make concessions. It is well, therefore, for the sake of its own adherents, to review the situation, to declare its own unhesitating convictions, to show where it treads with a sense of perfect security, undismayed by the efforts of its foes. Something of this kind is attempted in this volume, in the hope that it may dissipate the needless perplexities of loyal, troubled hearts.

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# IS RELIGION REASONABLE?

'I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.'—PAUL.

# CHAPTER I

## IS RELIGION REASONABLE?

Is religion reasonable? In the answer which I offer to this question I have chiefly in view men and women whose inclinations and sympathies are with the religious view of life and the world, but who have been startled and perplexed by scornful words in which religion has been waived out of court as effete, irrational, a tissue of myths and baseless superstitions. They have heard discussions as to the origin of religious belief, in which it has been attributed, say, to fear of ghosts or alarm at the catastrophic events of nature. And they have wondered if, after all, belief in an unseen God be not but a remnant of barbarism that should be dropped, in view of advancing civilisation and the discoveries of science.

Now at the very outset it may relieve the

strain of perplexity a little to notice a text of Paul's which occurs in a warning against idolatry and superstition. 'I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.'—1 Cor. x. 15. In effect this is the recognition of the propriety of bringing religious subjects to the test of our intelligence, and exercising our judgment upon them. Paul, a great leader among the followers of Jesus Christ, a master mind in things religious, expects no unconditional surrender of our intellectual powers in the presence of the things of the Spirit. His appeal is to intelligence. 'I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.' It is no sign of want of grace to feel that on religious matters men wish to have their minds satisfied by what demands adherence and obedience. It is what the men most loyal to our Saviour expect, and expect to be carried through thoroughly.

Putting away all fear, then, of offending against things sacred if we apply our minds to them, and equally refusing to be terrorised by the arrogance and aggressiveness of unbelief, let us calmly look at this question, Is religion reasonable? To answer it requires that we reach clearness on two points,

viz. What is religion? and What is to be accounted reasonable? I shall look at these in turn.

1. What is religion?

And we need to ask the question. For there is a great deal of abuse of the term. It is often used as if its reality were a mere matter of rites and ceremonies, or a life devoted to a ceaseless round of austerities, as though religion were the affair of a class, as the French speak of 'les religieux,' meaning monks, nuns, priests, and so on. Religion is something widely different from that. Then again we speak in a lax way of any absorbing enthusiasm as a man's religion, and, in a somewhat similar way, of the religion of art or beauty, the religion of humanity, meaning thereby that some men give themselves up to the study, contemplation, and service of art, humanity, or, for that matter, of sport or vice, with a devotion of spirit that would be religious were only its object worthy and not idolatrous. So what really is religion? Religion, as I take it, is the complete response of man's whole nature to the Unseen, the Infinite, the Eternal, and that not simply con-

ceived of as an ideal, but recognised, trusted, clung to, and obeyed as the one great and abiding reality. It includes two, if not three, factors. To begin with, there is an instinctive responsiveness to certain impressions made upon us by nature, history, and man. In every one of them we find drawings and pointings that take us beyond them, and point us to one we call God. Then in addition to this instinctive response, there is deliberate judgment on the meaning of all this; a point, that is, where conscious thought and reflection come into play. And then still further, there is a life that corresponds to these, partly mystical for the direct cultivation of the spirit by fellowship with the divine, and partly practical for the expression of the enhanced life which is called into existence as the result of response to and comprehension of these overpowering impressions. Religion, we thus see, is a complexity, but need not be a perplexity, if we remember that it is associated with not one side of our being only, but with our whole manhood, not with thought only, but also with feeling, not a matter of the intellect alone, but as much, if not much more,

of the will and of the practical life. If you challenge my statement, and say, If this be so, then there are very few persons in the world entitled to be called religious, or if you say that at this rate all that has passed for religion among savages and heathen, pagans, barbarous and civilised, ancients like the Romans and the Greeks, or moderns like the Hindoos and Chinese, is simply ruled out of court, I reply no. And I take up Dr. Edward Caird's position in reference to religion, that here you have to deal with a wonderful spiritual growth, and you are to judge of it not by the seed germ, or immature shoot, but by the full-grown plant. In a way you may say religion is an affair of experts, but, as Professor Marcus Dods says, the experts are saints, who know and exhibit what religion at its richest is. On a subject like this you go to men like Abraham, David, Isaiah, men like Paul or John, Augustine or St. Francis, Luther or Leighton. You take words like these, 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God'; 'My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God'; 'Oh that I knew where I might find Him!'; or with that longing satisfied

by the sense of God's abiding presence, 'Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?' Nay, take the Master Himself, see in Him a life lived in the abiding presence of God, and judge of what religion is by that, and not by your savage with his fetish, or the pontiff with candle, book, and bell. All inferior forms of religion short of the highest are adumbrations of what is beyond, just as the crude opinions of a child or an unlettered man are kindred to the speculations of a Plato or a Kant. They show that the instinct, that feeling after God if haply they may find Him, is universal, even while it is but vague and has not recognised its own full sense and status. And as Romanes well points out,—a man who in loyalty to a keen desire to get a satisfactory answer to this very question, Is religion reasonable? trod for years the way of atheism, till he found relief at last,—you cannot dispose of this universal instinct for God by saying that it is a hallucination, and that its existence is no argument that there is anything in reality to satisfy it; for if that were so, then it would stand out as a great solitary exception among the innate tendencies of our being, contradict-

ing everything we would naturally expect from every analogous experience.

You see what religion is, and where it stands, then, in our nature, and you ask is it rational, is it reasonable? Let me remark here that whether your answer to that question be yes or no, you have not got rid of religion. It is human. It is like the physical, the æsthetic, the affectional, the moral, ay the intellectual aptitudes of man. It is there, a part of him, with as good a right to its place as the faculty in whose interest you challenge it. Man is not one faculty, but many. We need to repeat Paul's old parable of the body in respect of the higher nature of man. There also, no one part may set itself up against the others, and challenge their right to speak unless they fall down and worship it. Just as the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you, so the mind cannot say to the heart or to the will or to the spirit, I have no need of you. If the whole were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were an ear, where were the smelling? So if the whole were but the rational, where were love, and song, and

prayer? If the intellect sets itself up as tyrant-dictator in man's nature, and challenges all with its query, Is this reasonable? these others may retort, Is the rational kind? is it beautiful? is it devout? and if not, expel it from its usurped position. So I say, whatever answer you may get to the question, Is religion reasonable? you are not thereby absolved from your bond with religion. It is a part of human nature, for which men are bound to make proper provision.

2. But lest, if I pursue this line further without explanations, I provoke protest and revolt, let us face this question,—what is entitled to be called reasonable, worthy of the assent of a rational man?

And I wish to say at once that logical and reasonable or rational are not equivalent and interchangeable terms. A train of argument may be strictly logical, and yet utterly unreasonable. Any lunatic asylum will furnish limitless proof of what I say. And that just tells that behind all deductions and arguments there is a realm of things, facts, principles, feelings, which come into contact with our being, and which, sooner or later,

justify their right to reception and regard, or are rejected in virtue of their congruity or incongruity with the harmony of our being. Those that come, and come to stay, do so because we judge them reasonable. What do we mean when we say 'reasonable'? Professor William James, the late brilliant occupant of the Edinburgh Gifford Lectureship, says that one characteristic mark of reasonableness or rationality is a strong feeling of ease, peace, rest, lively relief from puzzle and perplexity. Now I don't know that you could make much better of it than that. Anything, a fact, an event, a proposition, a feeling, commends itself as reasonable when it fits into our life's habit of thought and action smoothly and naturally, bringing with it a sense of peace, and relief from puzzle and perplexity. Apply that canon to religion. Take religion in any form, the crudest. Men fall in with it, because it seems to satisfy and end their perplexity as to the world in which they find themselves. They may, of course, accept a solution of their perplexities too readily, without sufficient caution, and speedily discover their mistake. The history of re-

ligion is a history of such expansions in Goethe's three stages, the ethnic or reverence of what is above us, the philosophic or reverence of our equals, and the Christian or reverence also for what is beneath us, the religion of self-sacrifice and humility. But if we take religion in its purest form, namely Christianity,—and for practical purposes our discussion as to the reasonableness of religion is a discussion as to the reasonableness of Christianity: if we are convinced that it is reasonable to be religious, Christianity is the religion we will embrace—and apply to it Professor James's canon, is it reasonable? Looking to the perplexities, the tragedies, the immensities of the Universe and of our life in it, and listening to the Founder of this religion, if we accept His offer, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden,'—those whose labour and burden is of the mind and spirit in travail with the cross-purposes of life,—can He fulfil His promise, 'I will give you rest'? That is to say, are the emotions which God revealed in Jesus Christ excites within us, the conceptions of man and the world and God which He conveys, the worship in spirit

and in practice which these involve, such as to bring a sense of harmony and peace to our minds? You can only answer that question by trying them. You can never get at the answer from the outside. It is only belief, the trustful response to Christ's message, which can properly test its value, and find out its reasonableness, or the reverse, by its success or failure to bring harmony and peace into your distracted life and thought. This is not to prejudge the case or to shift the ground. But it is to challenge you to follow the proper scientific course in dealing with any theory or problem. There is a point where mere discussion and theorising must cease, and the whole be put to the test of experiment. And it is to that test of the reasonableness of Christianity I invite you, if you are really in earnest in the inquiry. As I say, this no man can do for you. But Jean Paul Richter, in one of the most dramatic and tragic sketches ever written, has done something to help you to perceive the gravity of the issue involved. It is the account of a dream he once had. You will find it translated in full in the third volume of Carlyle's *Miscellaneous Essays*. He

dreamt that he was in a churchyard, when the day of Eternity broke, and the dead rose up to find the altar in the Church gone. A horrible fear creeps over them that there is no God, no heaven; when Christ appears, and they eagerly press around Him, and cry, 'Christ! is there no God?' And He replied, 'There is none!' Then the children cried, 'Jesus, have we no father?' And He answered, with streaming tears, 'We are all orphans, I and you, we are without Father!' And from their utter despair Christ turns to look with pitying eye upon the deluded earth, for whom there was no God to pray to, nothing in reality but 'dead, dumb nothingness! Cold Everlasting Necessity! Frantic Chance!' And the spectacle was too terrible for the dreamer, and all that was left to him was a ghastly spectacle of a living world crushed in the folds of the serpent of Eternity, and then shattered by the Hammer that strikes the last hour of time. 'When,' says Jean Paul, 'I awoke, my soul wept for joy that I could still pray to God: and the joy and the weeping and the faith in Him were my prayer.' The next time you have a fit of

atheism, a spasm of doubt, read that, and then tell me which fits best into the heartache and yearning of your soul, that, or the blessed revelation in Jesus of the Father in heaven, who knows what things ye have need of before ye ask Him, who gives us daily bread, and forgives our debts as we forgive our debtors, in whose house there are many mansions, and a place prepared for you, to which His Son will come to take you that you may spend eternity with Him. Is religion reasonable? The whole testimony of mind and heart and imagination and will, if it means anything, says that it is, and that only in the knowledge of a God is it saved from utter mental confusion and chaos and despair. Believe me, Carlyle is right. 'The delight of the destroyer and denier of religion is no pure delight and must soon pass away.' John Morley in his tragic volume *On Compromise* bears witness to that, as also do the letters and diary of G. J. Romanes in his time of spiritual eclipse. And even one of the crowning follies of the French Revolution is a proof of it. Following Voltaire the revolutionaries were at first declared atheists. But soon the truth of the

old classic dictum, 'Far more easily wilt thou build a city in mid-air than on earth found a city without the Gods,' asserted itself. And Robespierre and his associates decreed that there is a Supreme Being and the soul is immortal, and called on France to believe it. It is utterly grotesque. But it testifies to the persistent and rightful place which the religious element has in human nature. If you attempt to deny it or evade it, it returns like Nature itself. And reasonable men will read the signs, and see that religion is part of humanity, and it is unreasonable to deny it.

3. How then has this question ever arisen? How has it seemed possible to men to be in any doubt about the matter? Three reasons are worth mentioning.

(*a*) The first is this. Men find the religion of many who call themselves religious, or profess to adhere to Christ, so shockingly inconsistent. Listen to what Max Müller says—and he was called by one competent speaker 'the most eminent English authority of his day in the science of religion.' He says, 'When I look at the miserable streets of the great capitals of Europe, when I look at the

whole of Europe turned into a military camp, when I see our best genius spent on drill in, and on inventing new machines for, killing our fellow-creatures, it seems to me we are living not after but before the Christian era.' What does he mean? He means it is all so alien to the spirit of Christ. On a narrower field you see as offensive features in family and trade affairs. And yet we call ourselves Christian. We profess to believe in God revealed in Jesus Christ, to abhor sin and the works of the devil; we pray to be forgiven, made holy and unselfish; and then we live as if all were right between us and God, though the world's principles and not Christ's regulate our lives. That is not reasonable. That is insanity, and it makes men mad. It is the irrational practice of many men that makes others ask if their religion is reasonable at all.

(*b*) A second reason is this. Men so often attack this problem from the wrong side. Taking religion to be simply an affair of the head, and thinking that everything depends on the absolute cogency of what are called the arguments for the being of God, if they detect, or think they detect, a flaw in any of these

arguments, they draw off and conclude that religion is irrational, the ground for believing in the very existence of the grand object of its aspiration being unstable, undermined. But that involves a mistake which we have already noticed. Religion is not exclusively, nor even chiefly or primarily, a matter of the intellect. It is a matter of the spiritual aptitudes, supplying the head indeed with material on which to work, from which to draw deductions and regulate life, but not waiting on its verdict for the primary movements. And to demand of them proof that God exists, is like asking for proof that the sun shines, when it is blazing in the sky above you. The whole spiritual nature of man tells you to look at God's universe, to look at Jesus Christ, to look into the mystery of your own nature, and you will find God there before your eyes. If you will not open them, of course you cannot see God. But it is simply ludicrous for you to tell me He is not there, when I see Him revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, His Son. You are unreasonable, not my religion.

(*c*) A third reason is that men perceive what ought to be the practical results of

admitting the reasonableness of religion, but they have no wish to give effect to them, and, therefore, as Ruskin says, 'no argument can prove strong enough to convince them.' But it is not want of cogency in the argument, it is want of will that explains the case. Here you touch the antagonism of the heart of man to the will of God. And it is an enmity so deep-rooted that when other pretexts for resistance fail, and conscience knocks so loudly that alarm seizes the soul within, as a desperate resort it throws down the gauntlet and, to brazen it out, asks for proof that there is a God who ought to be obeyed. Here in the last resort is your true atheist. There is some excuse for the others. There is hope that they will get clear of the wood. But this is the fool that has really said in his heart, 'There is no God.' And the reason is that if he admits that there is a God, reason says he should obey Him, and conscience tells him that all the ways he loves are hated by God. That is the commonest kind of unconfessed atheism, the commonest kind of questioner of the day. He is the fruit of abounding materialism, not theoretic but practical,

abounding love and pursuit of mammon at all costs. That is the kind of man Ruskin describes, who, when urged by a friend of Ruskin's to put a little of God's laws into the conduct of his business, burst out blasphemously, 'Damn the laws of God.' That is the heart of the whole thing. And it is a sham for that man, or any like him, to tell you that he doubts if religion is reasonable. It is too reasonable for him. Men need to be on guard against that subtle mammon spirit. Do you know the origin of the Gifford Lectureships?[1] As told by one of the lecturers it was this,—and whatever we may think of the wisdom of the foundation, the story shows two things, viz., Lord Gifford's sense of the peril of materialism, and his conviction that the only real safeguard against it is quickened and renewed religious life;—one day towards the end of his life he sent for his brother and said, 'Brother John, I have had a terrible night.' 'What is the matter?' said his brother. He said: 'I begin to feel that I am growing fond

[1] The Gifford Lectureships are lectureships on Natural Religion, founded by the late Lord Gifford in connection with each of the Scottish Universities.

of my money. Now I am sure I must do something with it. I must make it useful not to myself and my family, but to my fellow-creatures at large.' And the issue was these lectureships. The love of money, materialism, is the real foe of religion: the horror of its power is a real impulse to natural and true religion.

Is religion reasonable? When I begin to study a question like that, to what books in my library do I turn to help me to an answer? To the books by those who are reckoned the noblest and profoundest thinkers of the ages, the ripest scholars, the giant intellects. And what answer do they give? While some, and they not the greatest, do hesitate to pronounce finally, the real leaders of thought, the men who have stamped their character, not only on their own age but on the ages that have followed, in all that makes for nobility of life and integrity of character, are all on the one side, giving glory to God. And when in addition to that I ask myself on which side do I find the purest, noblest, sweetest men and women, the heroes and the saints, they are all with those who believe in God. And when I turn

to the grandest of the sons of men, to Him who stood peerless above them, the Son of Man, and ask Him, What sayest Thou? His answer is explicit; religion is the essence of His life—'My meat and My drink is to do the will of Him that sent Me.' Religion was the spring and atmosphere of the sanest, simplest, sincerest life ever lived upon this earth. If religion is not reasonable, the world is given up entirely and eternally to the rule of some Abbot of Unreason, the earth is a madhouse, and there is no truth or sanity anywhere.

CAN WE TRUST THE GOSPELS?

'Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word: it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed.'

LUKE.

'This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true.'

ORIGINAL CERTIFICATE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL.

## CHAPTER II

### CAN WE TRUST THE GOSPELS?

THE question we are to look at in this chapter is, 'Can we trust the Gospels?' We have to deal with the genuineness, the reliability, of the Gospels. And this is a matter that lies very near the centre of our faith, though not at the very centre itself. Its importance is due to the fact that these Gospels are the authorities for our knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Saviour. Not that there are no other references to Him in contemporary literature. There are such. But they are so fragmentary and so ill-informed that if we were dependent on them we should know practically nothing about Jesus of Nazareth at all, and should have had no literary material to justify the opinion that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Of course if a great army of saved lives had still remained pointing to this almost un-

known character as the secret of their reclaimed natures, that spectacle might itself have compelled faith, though the strain would have been great. But for material on which to form an independent judgment on the question, 'Who was Jesus?' we are largely dependent on the four Gospels. Can we trust them?

But what need is there to raise this question? What does it mean? Probably this. These Gospels have been thrown into the melting pot. They have been so sifted and criticised; there have been so many untoward hints, suspicions, hesitations, such comparings and contrastings of them, that men are perplexed and do not know what exactly to believe, or how far to depend on them. They are not so much in doubt as they are uneasy, and they have not the materials for coming to a decision for themselves.

Now I do not wonder at that feeling. There is a good deal to explain it. And yet, let me say at once, that as the result of all the criticism, there is really more ground for intelligent trust in the Gospels as a whole to-day, than there was during many and many a day when not a doubt was felt. Here is what Harnack,

the greatest authority on the subject in our day, says—and he is no conservative, but one of the most independent and thoroughgoing of scientific critics—'Sixty years ago, David Friedrich Strauss thought that he had destroyed the historical reliability of the three first Gospels in almost every direction. The historico-critical work of two generations has succeeded in the mass in re-establishing them.' Still much of the very work by which that has been done has been of a character that does not impress the untrained observer. He sees processes at work instead of results, and he is as little calmed or edified as 'fools or bairns' with the sight of half-finished work.

He sees this, for instance—and it is one of the things that has doubtless disconcerted some, and which is often used in a crude way to cast seeming disparagement on the Gospels. When you study the Gospels you find that there are a great many passages in which there is the most remarkable similarity between them in the very words. This is particularly true in the first three Gospels. And it is true, not only in the reporting of the words of Jesus where we might expect it; but it is

also true in the narrative of events, where we might have expected a good deal of variety in the ways of telling the same incident. Men ask how has this happened? Must not the writers have copied from one another? Or must they not all have copied from some other person? But if they copied from one another, then why has Matthew left out some of the things which Mark gives, and why has he made any changes in his copying? Or if they all copied from some other person, why do they vary as they do? As the result of asking these questions, and of trying to answer them and to find time for the answer that alone seemed to satisfy some, it was said that these Gospels could not have been written till long after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were all in their graves. Now when plain folks hear this, the mere asking of the questions, to say nothing of the answers, throws many of them into alarm and perplexity, most of it quite needless. For when you just stand back and look calmly at the whole situation, you feel that the disputants may be left to fight it out, and you need not trouble yourselves about the matter till they are done. They are all just

a magnified edition of what I once heard from a crude young probationer. He proved elaborately that Psalm cxxxvii., 'By the rivers of Babylon,' etc., on the ground of internal evidence, was clearly written by an exile in Babylon, and that the man was Jeremiah. But when I asked him afterwards how he reconciled his theory with the fact that in the whole account of the life of Jeremiah we never have a hint that he was in Babylon, that on the contrary all through the commencement of the exile he tells us he was in Jerusalem, while after the fall of Jerusalem, though much against his will, he was compelled to go and end his days, in exile indeed, though not in Babylon, but hundreds of miles from it, in Egypt, this young critic had no answer. 'Do you know,' he said, 'I didn't think of that.' 'I thought not,' said I, 'but it's essential.' And there are many broad facts about the Gospels which those theorising critics, who tell us so positively why the parable of the Prodigal Son, say, is in Luke's Gospel and why in Matthew it is left out, have not thought of, or at any rate have not sufficiently allowed for, in their anxiety to magnify their own little pet schemes.

Not but what there is a great deal that is of interest and of value in what they have noticed and have brought to light. There is, for instance, great gain in recognising that, after all, our Gospels were not originally written simply as dry state papers to give day and date and precise details for particular events in the life of Jesus. They had a far more living purpose to serve. They were written to awaken men's faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Saviour of their souls. They were written by men to whom He was all this, and were, therefore, in a sense a confession of their faith and a reason for the hope that was in them. And written some decades after the close of Christ's career, they naturally are now and then coloured by the living interests of the exact time for which they were written. But does that mean to say that therefore they are not historical, or that dry detail is the only true reliable history, and that beyond that you cannot trust them. The thing is absurd. Apply the principle in a parallel case and you will see. Take two accounts of the same place, one from a legal document detailing the boundaries of a piece of land, a farm steading say,

and another from a literary artist. Which will be the recognisable account? I have been told by a lawyer's clerk, who had the drawing out of deeds describing places he had lived in all his days, and he said, 'I would not have recognised one of them from the description'; and yet they were strictly, painfully accurate in one way. But read a description of Swanston by Robert Louis Stevenson, or of Thrums by J. M. Barrie, or of Edinburgh by Sir Walter, and you would know the place at once. And yet you imagine you have greater accuracy and more trustworthiness in the other than in this. As I say, the thing is absurd. And so it is here. What you have in the Gospels is a living picture with all the air of truth about it, that verisimilitude that guarantees itself, that indefinable something which you feel instinctively, even if you cannot describe it. This is how the rough cowboy described the situation in *The Sky Pilot*. The missionary had got their interest thoroughly enlisted in the New Testament story, and the most of these rough wild spirits were falling under the spell of the gospel, when one late-comer to the new country from

the sophisticated air of the Old World cut in with the remark, 'That's out of the Bible, isn't it, and how do you know it's true?' Before the missionary had time to reply, Bill the cowboy cut in, 'Look here, young fellow, how do you know anything's true? How do you know the Pilot here' (as they called the missionary), 'how do you know the Pilot here is true when he speaks? Can't you tell by the feel? You know by the sound of his voice, don't you?' Bill paused, and the young fellow agreed readily. 'Well, how do you know the son of a jackass when you see him?' Again Bill paused. There was no reply. 'Well,' said Bill, 'I'll give you the information without extra charge. It is by the sound he makes when he opens his jaw.' And it is always so. Wisdom and folly, truth and falsehood, reveal themselves in the utterance of them. You feel it at once. Trust the Gospels. They ring true as soon as you read them. But that's the trouble. The people who are unsettled by the suspicions and aspersions—as they regard them—of critics, are chiefly people who don't read them. If you want to find out if you can trust your Gospels, I know of

no better advice to give you on the subject than to say, go and read them, and re-read them, and judge for yourself. Ask yourself of their record, is that a lie, or is it the truth? I am not afraid of the verdict of an open fair-minded man. The very men we are told to dread, would tell you the very same thing. Strauss, the bugbear of our fathers' days, has no following now. He has been found out. I quoted what Harnack says of him and his theories. Take even a man like Schmiedel, whose work in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* on the Gospels simply took some folk's breath clean away, because he found only some seven sayings of Jesus in them of which he seemed to be absolutely certain. Does he mean that all the rest is unreliable? No, not if I understand him aright. But here, he says, is something which nobody in his senses could reject, and here is something, say we, that gives us a starting point from which to establish the reliability of a great body of truth in them. Let us think the best we can of these men, not the worst, though I am far from satisfied with all they think they are entitled to reclaim. At their worst they have not destroyed, and at

their best they have practically re-established, on scientific ground, the reliability of the Gospels.

The remarkable thing, to my thinking, is this. On the one side, looking at their own investigations, critics arrive at results which seem to me ludicrously like the orthodox position, and like the refutation of their own theories. On the other, men leaving this analytical school to their own devices, have arrived at results that make some of their most staggering theories simply impossible. Let me explain myself. As I have stated, the problem which all the minute and disconcerting analysis of the different Gospels raised was how to account for the similarities and diversities among them. And at the long and the last of it we are told that these Gospels of ours could not have been written just as they are at first hand by their original authors, but they must have worked with and on older documents which certainly three of them all used. And what are these documents supposed to have been? To begin with, there must have been a sketch of the life of Christ very like our Gospel according to Mark.

Then there must have been a collection of the sayings of Jesus very like our Gospel according to Matthew, but used by Luke too. And then there must have been another collection of the sayings of Jesus, somewhat differently arranged and with a good deal of new matter, very like our Gospel according to Luke. And then the man who wrote the Gospel of John must have known these three, and added many new things which he had heard privately from John. Now why this 'very like,' 'very like'? Why not say at once what all their investigation has practically brought them to, that the men who wrote these writings were Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and that the writings to which all go back were just the Gospels that for eighteen hundred years have been ascribed to them. Why not say that there are a great many of the variations in the way of telling the story we cannot give a reason for,—ignorance here is no disgrace,—but we can imagine it. The authors were writing clearly for different parts of the then known world. They were writing to people who had heard the story by word of mouth over and over again, and in some cases from the very

eye and ear witnesses. They were writing about the same person and reporting characteristic events and specimen days in his life, giving specimen utterances from his lips. And all these were in reference to a personality, so striking and unique, that it was almost impossible for them to avoid reproducing the impression he made with extraordinary sharpness and accuracy and similarity. These things to me suggest explanations of all the similarity and variety, and it seems easier to explain these in immediate followers of Jesus than in men of a later date dealing only with documents and reports.

But what right have we to think that the tradition is true that ascribes them to the time and pen of Matthew the publican, and Mark the friend of Peter, and Luke the friend of Paul, and John the disciple of Jesus? It is in this way. We have books, copies of the New Testament, fifteen hundred years old, which give us the words of the Gospels which we know from contemporary writers were then ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Over two hundred years before that, back, that is to say, to a time not greater than that which

separated us from the days of the Jacobites we have books that tell us explicitly that the four Gospels which we can recognise as our four, were then in existence and believed by everybody to be written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The men who wrote the books I refer to, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, do not all belong to one place. One of them, Irenæus, was quite familiar by personal travel and residence with the life and thought and practice of both Asia Minor and the South of France. Clement, in the same way, knew the opinion of Egypt. And Tertullian similarly could speak for the whole of the rest of the North of Africa. That is to say, we have evidence of what was thought about their authorship within one hundred and ten years of the time at which we believe the earliest of them to have been written. Nobody had any doubt about it. We have a commentary by a very heretic of that day on one of them. Go nearer them still, to the days of Tatian and Justin Martyr and Papias, that is to say within fifty years of the time when John was still alive, and what do we find? We find express testimony that

Matthew wrote the oracles of the Lord in Hebrew, and that Mark wrote a report of what he heard Peter say about the Lord. We find Tatian writing an elaborate harmony of the four Gospels, and what fragments of it have come down to us show clearly that his four were our four. And Justin Martyr tells us that the Gospels, which can be recognised as our Gospels, were read at public worship in the churches in his day with the same reverence and respect as were the books of the Old Testament. Consider what all that means. These things are not mentioned by them as curiosities or novelties. They are reported as what was familiar and ordinary. Within fifty years of the time of John's death, our Gospels were familiarly known, and generally read in Christian worship. That is not a thing that comes into existence in a day. When that has become a well-established and general custom, it means that there is a long history behind it, and if you allow for that, as you must do to be fair, you are carried back the fifty years to the lifetime of men who could check the accuracy of the statements made in the Gospels, and who could

challenge the current talk as to their authorship, if it were not true. These four are not the only writings which purported to give an account of Jesus Christ. There were others, which partially survive: others of which we only know their names: others still which are only known by vague reference to their discarding. But these four stand out, by the beginning of the second century, as selected by the Church by a process of natural selection and survival of the fittest, as the reliable witnesses to the origin and Founder of Christianity. That is the testimony of history. It guarantees the trustworthiness, and that as the result of a sifting process, of our four Gospels.

But there is more than that. I am satisfied that this justifies the conviction that their traditional authors are their real authors. Take me back to within the lifetime of the younger contemporaries of the reputed authors; show me works in circulation bearing their names; let me hear not a whisper against this view; and then ask me to ignore all that and to believe that, eighteen hundred years afterwards, you have found out that they did not write these books, but that others wrote them

from books very like them, originals which now have perished but which may probably have been written by the men to whom I ascribe these, and I say you ask too much. I say I am content to believe that these are themselves the originals. And all the more so for these reasons. While you have been discussing the differences and similarities in the four sides of the frame of this picture, others have been studying the wood, the carving, and the gilt, and all alike take me back to times where I cannot believe that others dared palm off forgeries on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, to times where mistakes as to the authors could not have had time or opportunity to strike root and bloom without being contradicted by men who knew. And along the line of study of the language used, as exhibited in the surviving literature of the day, and of the evidence of archæology, wrought in monument and civic documents that have survived, quoted by men like Blass and Deissman and Ramsay, we find these writings reliable wherever they can thus be tested, and reliable therefore we may assume all through. Having reached this, these Gospels

witness to one another. Here is John, the last of them, and evidently acquainted with all the other three. He has no hesitation in repeating some, and in leaving out more, of what they contain, just as it served his immediate purpose. Why worry further, then, as to the motives of Matthew and Luke? Luke has been vindicated by the most painstaking student and freshest investigator of the records in paper and stone of those days as a reliable historian in the Acts. Why treat him as a romancer in his Gospel? He tells us deliberately that he had many a written document to go by when he started to write his Gospel, and that his anxiety was to investigate and mark out the proper order. Why forbid us to think that Mark and Matthew were among his texts? Matthew, we are told, preserved the oracles of Christ in Hebrew. No Aramaic or Hebrew text of Matthew survives. But why may not this Greek Matthew which we have, which has too a peculiarly Hebrew savour about it, why may it not be a Greek translation of that Hebrew record made by Matthew himself, the custom-house clerk, who would only be fit for his original occupa-

tion if he could speak and write more languages than one in his home in Galilee of the Gentiles, where Greek was as common as his native tongue? Why ask us to think that though Mark may have written the original, our Gospel has been slightly worked up from that. It is not necessary ; it helps nothing. It is more probable we have the original here. And now we have got behind the Gospels to the men. And our question is not simply can we trust what we find in the books, be the writers who they may, but are these men capable of inventing such a glorious story as the fourfold record holds?

Let me reply to this question in both its forms. For myself I do not care who wrote these Gospels. They bear the stamp of truth upon them. The great mass of their contents is palpably the product of the earliest days of the Church's life, and sprang into existence on Palestinian soil. Remember how much that means. It means they must have been written, taken shape, within forty years of the death of Christ. Why? Because, though cradled in Palestine, in forty years from its origin Christianity had shifted its centre from

that land to the Greek-speaking world. Its earliest literature is Greek. Its only surviving Gospels are written in Greek. But while elsewhere in its literature the Greek is native, in the Gospels, while the words are the words of Greece, the style is the style of Palestine. You cannot get away from that. In less than fifty years after the origin of Christianity it had become practically impossible to write the first three Gospels, as we have them, anywhere within its borders. The fourth Gospel is the best proof of this, so different in form and style. The pith of these three Gospels comes straight from Palestine, Palestine in the time of the men who knew Jesus of Nazareth, and who wrote and spoke, when every word they uttered, every line they penned, was liable to challenge and contradiction if it was not true. So I say I do not care who wrote the Gospels. What they contain is sifted truth, straight from Palestine, straight from Christ.

For be they Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John who wrote them or not,—though I see no reason to doubt that they are,—do you know of any others of the early Christians, any

better qualified naturally to write this wonderful story, which clearly comes from Palestine, the Palestine of Christ's day, full of a life that moves on a higher plane than this of earth, that embodies thoughts too deep for words, that speaks in terms that are spirit and life? These simple men could not invent it, not one of them, far less four. The Christ of the Gospels stands apart, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Whoever wrote His story did not invent it, for at the time when it was written, no one had the genius to do it, just as none who has ever tried to write the life of Christ since has ever made anything of it that you would think for a moment of comparing with the matchless workmanship of the Gospels. Those who wrote that life only told what they knew and had seen and heard. Jesus is the Truth. They tell the Truth. Trust them? Of course. It is easier here to trust than to doubt. They ultimately vindicate themselves.

But if that is so, what a responsibility they impose! They bring within our reach the image of the living Christ as He appeared on earth. Not to read them is to ignore God.

To read them heedlessly, to neglect them, is to neglect God's message to men. To read them, trust them as a message from God, and not act upon the message or believe on Him of whom they tell, is to take God's message less seriously than do the devils; it is to play the very fool. To feel that these are books you can trust is a call, a serious call, to set your minds to them, to act upon their counsel. They are all written by believing men for the object John set before him, and it was this, 'that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His name.'

# CAN WE ACCOUNT FOR JESUS?

'Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?'

THE MEN OF NAZARETH.

## CHAPTER III

### CAN WE ACCOUNT FOR JESUS?

THE subject we have now to consider is, 'Can we account for Jesus?' When we say that, we mean, can we give an explanation of the features of His character and His career in line with the ordinary conditions of human life Can we without calling in anything supernatural to our aid find a place for Him within the ordinary ranks of humanity? Can we show that just as there have been geniuses in the ranks of poetry, art, or rule of men, so there have been geniuses in the sphere of religion, and He is simply one of them? Or must we say all this fails? we cannot account for Him. That is the question that sometimes is perplexing.

(i) But notice at the outset about whom we are asking this question. It is about the Jesus of the New Testament, to whom Christi-

anity owes its existence. It is the Christ, the Christ of the Gospels, the Christ of the Epistles, the Christ of the Christian Church, we have to account for, for He is the real Christ. The fact of Christ ought now in fairness to be admitted by everybody who makes any claim to the attention of intelligent men. As we saw in our last chapter, the trustworthiness of the Gospels is practically beyond dispute. The Jesus they present is a real character. The facts of His life, as stated there, are true. It is on the basis of these as facts, that we must have an explanation that will satisfy, if it can be given. And any attempted explanation that simply waives any of these aside is vitiated, is a failure, is unscientific. It has not dealt with all the facts.

What strengthens this position is that any fair treatment of the New Testament writings as a whole, so far as they deal with what is stated there as to the person of Christ, arrives at this result, viz. :—they present a harmonious picture. The Christ of Paul, the Christ of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the Christ of John, the Christ of the Apocalypse and the Christ of the Epistle

to the Hebrews, all agree, and agree with Christ's own presentation of Himself. Not but what each has its own characteristic points. Had this not been so, we should have been suspicious. But amid all the diversity of presentation, amid all the variety of natural temperament among those who express their minds about Him, there is a fundamental agreement. The pictures are many; the original is one. It would take too much space to work this out in detail here.[1] I can only remind you of one significant point. Sometimes the attempt is made to draw a contrast between the human Christ of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the divine Christ of Paul and John. But what is fatal to that distinction, as if it indicated any disagreement on this point, is that Paul was the earliest of New Testament writers and John the latest, and these two agree in explicitly crowning Christ Lord of all. And the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke came in between Paul and John without a whisper of dissent

[1] I venture to refer my readers to the chapter bearing on the subject in my volume on *The Relation of the Apostolic Teaching to the Teaching of Christ*. Chap. VI. 'Son of Man and Son of God.'

from that well-known and wide-spread opinion —for Paul preached and wrote to people all over the world of the day—and these Gospels simply give the story of the earthly life of Him whom Paul was teaching men to worship as the Son of God. Had that not been the view of the Synoptists also, protests should and would have been written on their books. But there is none. The men therefore who tell us all the humblest, most intensely human, pathetic, and tragic incidents of that career, believed with Paul that that Man of Sorrows, despised and rejected of men, was the Son of God, held, as John did, that look more closely at that veil of flesh, and you see the glory shining through.

Still more we must remember that that agrees with Christ's own presentation of Himself. Read the meaning of the way in which He asserted His claims as you please, it is simply to blink facts not to recognise that ere His death Jesus explicitly claimed to be the Messiah promised by God, and in a quite unique way, entitling Him to divine homage, to be the Son of God. And if you try to summarise the proofs He offers of His claims, you will find they are these—His unstained

conscience, His peculiar intimacy with and relationship to God, supported by His miracles and His predicted and afterwards accomplished resurrection. If you are to account for Jesus, you must have an explanation of that intense sense of the malignity of sin, side by side with a conscience that had no misgivings as to its own loyalty to God's will, a will perceived by Him with keener insight than ever man has had before or since. You must explain that unparalleled familiarity with God, forming of Him a conception as lofty as it was tender, as intimate as it was spiritual, as real as it was unique, 'the Father,' 'My Father.' You must explain the resurrection anticipated and fulfilled. For short of that your explanation is none.

Ah! but, you say, was it not a fatal flaw on that character, enough to discount all the seeming humility, for Him to urge such claims? No. Truth demanded it, for one thing. More than that, study the record, and you will find that when the claim was advanced it was always either in self-defence or to confirm a faith which His life and character had evoked. To have failed to assert His

claim in such circumstances would have been to be false. And in any case, it is no proof of humility to be ignorant of one's powers or one's rights, no lack of humility when need is to maintain them. Still more you must explain the offers which He made, and which all who come to Him find fully implemented to the comfort and the saving of their souls.

(ii) 'Explain, explain'; you say, 'account, account'; where is all the need for it? Ay, where is it? But that is just one of the extraordinary things about Jesus of Nazareth. Men have always felt that they must account for Him. And that itself should make us think. No other member of the human race affects us so. No other one so persistently arouses in men's minds the question, Who art thou? compels them to feel His uniqueness, the difference between Him, man as He is, and His contemporaries, and indeed all other men. Not but what there are other exceptional men, Homer and Dante among the poets, Michael Angelo and Turner among the artists, Aeschylus and Shakespeare among the dramatists, Caesar and Napoleon among the men of imperial fame, Moses and Solomon among

the lawgivers, Elijah, Isaiah, John the Baptist among the prophets, Plato and Kant among the thinkers, Socrates, Goethe, and Browning among the students of men, Buddha, Confucius, Mahomet, Paul, John, Luther, among the leaders of religion; they all are exceptional. Yet of none of them do we feel compelled to give an account. The story of each life, so far as it is known, interests us. But Jesus stands up before us. We read the story of His life, and immediately we feel like Moses at the Burning Bush, burning and not consumed. We must 'turn aside and see.' It does not matter what we are engaged on, we must turn aside and investigate this. Here is a humble Galilean peasant. In three short years, closing with a malefactor's death, but followed by an astounding return, He laid the foundation of the most spiritual religion that has ever appeared on earth, and He has so woven His own personality into the texture of that religion that He is Himself its central figure, with the value of God for all His true adherents, and He has attained that position, not after long-delayed meditation and reflection by men of later days, but immediately and in

the faith and esteem of the men and women who lived most continuously in His immediate company. No wonder that ever since men and women who have really met Him at all have felt that this presented a problem they could not evade. And the very persistency of the recurrence of the inquiry is testimony to His singular position.

It was so in His own day. Men discussed Him then. They questioned Him before His face. They talked of Him behind His back. Scholars and courtiers, Nicodemus and Herod, the scrupulously religious and the man in the street, the Pharisee and the blind beggar, every section of the community had its opinion to offer on the question, Who was Jesus? Look at them at Nazareth. He is so different from His family. He is so unlike His surroundings. He has no business to perplex us, they said, and with strange illogicality they turned away offended. For the first four hundred years of its history, this was the subject most keenly disputed in the Christian Church, as the only answer grew clearer and clearer, and suggestion after suggestion was made to evade the issue. At the Reformation

it re-awoke, and to-day it is in the front again. Can you point to anything like that in all the annals of mankind? This is no nine days' wonder. It is the perennial quest of man, to explain to himself Jesus Christ. It is no use to attempt to escape it. Men will always return to it. But it only goes to prove that a greater than Solomon, a greater than Jonah, is here.

(iii) Let us look at the more recent attempts to account on naturalistic grounds for Jesus.

It seems almost *post horam* to speak now of Strauss or Renan, the bogeys of our fathers' days. They are no more than names to frighten children with, like Clavers or Cromwell to Scottish mothers or Irish peasants. And yet there are men belated enough to think that still something can be said for Strauss's theory that Jesus, the Son of God, was a myth that had gathered through the credulous folk-lore of His earliest adherents. This will not bear investigation. The patient study of mythology, of myths and their origin and growth, has shown that no myths ever grew as did the story of the life of Jesus or the faith which He inspired. Just as little will sensible men lend an ear to Renan telling

them that Jesus was an amiable impostor, a religious genius, who to serve great ends was content to connive at the credulous suppositions and assertions of His followers. A structure like Christianity with such a high-toned morality, with such a pure-souled conception of God, with such an extraordinary inherent capacity for recovery from the most painful relapses, could not possibly have at its foundations the artful scheming of a trickster, no matter how amiable, kind, and well-intentioned. So these accounts are voted out of court. No man who wishes to be considered up-to-date would any more think of appealing to Strauss or Renan than a traveller would think of returning to horse tramways or the mail coach.

In our day the attempt has rather been to ransack the records of Christ's time and show Him to be merely the product of the combination of the influences then existent. The teachings of Hillel and Shammai, the great Rabbis of that age, the movings of thought among the Essenes, the impress made upon their time by the Apocalyptic literature, as it is called, *i.e.*, the often grotesque Utopias in which the then Jews pictured the coming

of Messiah and the Messianic kingdom, the political unrest and ferment caused by Rome's aggression, all that in Judaism, we are told, went to the making of Christ. Not less is made of the play of Greek thought. We are told that among the Stoics were anticipated Christ's views of universal brotherhood, among the Platonists His lofty thoughts of God. And these all telling on His mind, which was wonderfully receptive and devout, He became what He was. Still more, they say, stripped of the accretions of Rabbinical refinement and comment, there was all that was profound and serious and venerable and spiritual in the purer faith of His people; there were the noble traditions of His people's history and the legacy of all their prophecies; and these again told, told most of all, in making Jesus what He was. But once more the theory has failed. The frankest, thoroughest students who have started to prove this case have come back to tell us so. These influences did not make Jesus. The more that is known of all the environment and of all the possible collateral influences, the more men are compelled to say that Jesus was not the mere child of His

time, an exquisite specimen of a common type. Philo was such. John the Baptist was such. They show us in their best form what Hellenic culture and Jewish aspiration respectively could make of men. But how different is Jesus! His contemporaries and His times will not account for Him. When all these sources are searched to their deepest, we still are left asking, 'Whence hath this man all these things?' Hegel's philosophy has tried to resolve Jesus into a mighty symbol, the symbol of the eternal union of God and man. Ritschl's theology tends to leave Him a mere memory, potent by dint of His matchless character and the exalted thoughts of God He gave to men. But history in each case protests. Its evidence is potent and well attested. And it declares that it is the Saviour, not the symbol, that holds the hearts of men. And the history is prized not simply because of what it tells of what Jesus was then, the hero of earth's past, but because when there He caused us to hope and see the eternal photograph of our absent yet ever-present Friend. No, no attempt to account for Jesus that does not do more than grub in the past,

or dream in the clouds, can answer our question satisfactorily, or tell us who He was.

(iv) Let us come to the solution that satisfies.

The only account of Jesus that will satisfy the facts recorded of Him and the place He has secured in the life of mankind is that He is the Son of God, that He is God in personal union with human nature, the God-man. I can imagine three lines of objection to that account. (1) You may say it involves the supernatural. And I reply, of course it does. But why? Because the natural has failed, will not account for Jesus. He is supernatural, and is Himself a proof of its existence. (2) Again men may say, but if God was to come into union with human nature, then it must have taken place on such and such lines, and Jesus does not conform to them. Let me ask in reply what is the authority for saying how this must have taken place, if it did take place? Are there any facts to back the statement? If not, it is pure theory, and Jesus the God-man is a fact, the great unique fact of the kind, and He is the norm of how God can unite with manhood, and any theory must start from this fact. (3) But still further, you may say that the

universe proceeds on the line of evolution, of gradual development that knows no breaches, and here is a break, a divine intervention. Again I say, you must then overhaul your doctrine of evolution and find room in it for such a break as this, for it is a fact. And facts cannot be ignored or ruled out of court to suit theory. That is not scientific. Besides, does evolution necessarily know nothing of breaks? What of the origin of organised matter, what of the commencement of vital forces? What of the advance to intelligence and moral sensibility? And why no room for a new divine intervention to repair, and more than repair, the wreck of sin, and to introduce the highest of earth's kingdoms, not mineral, or vegetable, or animal, or rational, but the Kingdom of God? Ah! but you say, you never get the perfect specimen at the commencement. Of that all through I have my doubts. And I imagine the crest of the wave often comes first. But in any case, in Jesus you have not only the perfect sample, but the creative cause, and the case is altogether unique, and you must—I say it again—adjust your theory to meet the facts, and not presume

to rule facts out of court to accommodate your theory. The objections then must all stand aside, because they all presume that they still can do what on investigation it was found they cannot do, namely, account for Jesus on natural lines. He stands outside of them—unique, original, supernatural, a law to Himself—God manifest in the flesh.

But here another line of objection opens. It comes from the heart, the heart that was so thrilled and charmed by the sympathy of Jesus. And a feeling like that of Mary Magdalene, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him,' stirs in anxious breasts, as they hear that Jesus was not merely man, but the God-man. It seems to put Him beyond our reach. How can He be an example to me? The conditions of my existence are so different; His divinity a resource that is not within my reach. How can he really have felt temptation, as I do, if all the while He was God? Was not the whole experience a mere show? Can He really be said to have had a human experience, truly qualifying Him to sympathise with men, if He was not a mere man, but the Divine Man?

And one can understand, and sympathise with, the spirit that breathes in questions like these. And yet, what a loss, were it not true that He is as divine as He is human! The value of His sympathy, of His understanding from experience of all that it means of sorrow, temptation, and weakness to be a man, is just this, that it guarantees for us that God thus knows it all. And you gain nothing if you bring Jesus near in a way that still leaves God far away. And my reply to this objection is to point once more to the fact, to Jesus Himself, and ask if there is the faintest suspicion of mere show in His tears, His agonies and cries. Is there? No. It is all painfully, intensely, humanly real. And in Him God felt that. How could it be? I cannot tell. But there it is, and all attempts to explain Jesus on purely natural lines have failed. He must be God. But He reveals thereby how close God can come to man, theorise against it as we will.

I cannot agree with those who seem to grow alarmed when men in proof of the divinity of Jesus point to the perfection of His humanity. Of course, if what is meant by the alarm is that thus His divinity is reduced to nothing

more than the perfection of His humanity, I agree. It is abuse of terms to speak of that as divinity. That is not what we mean when we say that Jesus is divine. But I do find proof that Jesus is divine in the perfection of His humanity. To find One sinless amid a sin-smitten race, to find One in perfect harmony with the will of God among a race who otherwise to a man transgress it, to find in Him new graces for human life never suspected before, is to meet with a potency in humanity which is not human, takes us beyond the sin-smitten race. Had man never fallen, never been stained by sin, then such a character would have provoked no surprise, betrayed no higher power. But in a fallen race, such wonderful recovery says, God is here, this is the Son of God.

Yes, but you say, others may be sons of God. He taught them to aspire to this. He gave those that believed in Him power also to become sons of God. Yes, but mark that statement. What He *was*, they could only *become*. What He was, and what He knew He was just in virtue of the fact, Son of God and God his Father in a union of divine being

and relationship that nothing could dissolve, formed the archetype of what others might become in union with Himself. But even then it would be share in His Sonship, possession of the spirit that comes from Him, that would make them children, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

And so the fact stands out that here in Jesus we have God in human flesh. It is the only account of Him that does justice to the facts of His life. It is the only account of Him that explains the tragedy of His death. It is the only account of Him that will tally with the marvellous triumph of His cause, and the position which He has occupied in the attention of the world since. He is the cynosure of all the world's greatest minds. For any one to ignore Jesus is to consign himself to oblivion. Scholars, poets, painters, musicians, statesmen, philanthropists, men of science and letters, all acknowledge Him as Lord, or do Him at least the grudging homage that they must reckon with Him. They all treat Him as they treat no other man ; they treat Him as they treat God.

And yet the question always reappears. No

sooner is it assented to, that Jesus is God in human flesh, and men have tried to state what it means in terms, than protest arises and fresh inquiry begins. The theological statement of it never satisfies, and men appeal from the Christ of dogma and council's definition and decree to the Jesus of the Gospels whom they know and love. And they are right, and for this reason. Jesus is not content with a mere intellectual assent to a theological statement of what He is. He did not come into the world simply to offer men a theological problem and give highest marks for the most correct solution of it. He does expect men to face a problem, but it is not the problem of theological statement; it is the problem of His actual career and present power. He desires that they should patiently, intelligently, study His life, His death, His resurrection, His character, His teaching, His whole career. He asks them, as He asked His apostles of old in view of this, Whom say ye that I am? and He still regards a correct answer as He regarded Peter's, as no mere fruit of mental greatness, but a kind of revelation to the man Himself, a blessed gift from the Father to

his soul. He expects men to grow into the knowledge of Him through the familiarity that comes by faith and obedience and love. And anything short of that is worthless, a cold salute for a passionate falling at His feet. Therefore the question reappears, to force men along the proper lines to a proper answer, which shall be the product, not of hearsay or of cold indifference, induced not by logic but by faith, begotten not of discussion on the terms but by practice of His friendship and His love, the product of a keener vision than that of Thomas of the wounded hands and side, a vision of the inner sight that has not seen and yet has believed, and admiring cries, 'My Lord and my God.'

# HOW DOES CHRISTIANITY PERSIST?

'If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.'—GAMALIEL.

# CHAPTER IV

## HOW DOES CHRISTIANITY PERSIST?

THE persistence of Christianity is a fact. Nearly nineteen hundred years after the death of its Founder, crucified as a blasphemer and impostor, it is still here. And it stands now as nominally the religion of one-third of the human race, the most generally professed creed in the world, and admittedly the faith of the most enlightened nations of the world. That Christianity does persist is a fact. But it is a fact that is perplexing.

It is certainly perplexing to its opponents and critics, though they will not always admit it, or they resort to the most crude expedients to explain it. But it is no less surprising to its adherents, if for a moment they forget the true explanation of how it comes to be. When that is recalled the persistence seems most natural, nay, it confirms the second alternative in Gamaliel's dictum. Time has shown that

neither friends nor foes can overthrow it. It must be of God.

And yet what a strange thing to be of God! That the gospel, as we have it in its simplicity on the lips and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, should be of God causes no surprise. But that this strange stretch of history, which we call the Christian era, this strange house divided against itself called the Christian Church, this congeries of conflicting opinions which we group together as the Christian Creed, should be of God, should in any sense be of God,—that is staggering; that is a surprise. For the history of Christianity, the history of Christendom, is often dismal, disappointing reading. A book appeared not long ago by a keen antagonist of Christianity, by a man who avows himself a rationalist, in which from his standpoint he gives a history of the rise and progress of Christianity. Its earlier chapters are simply ludicrous through the crudity and credulity they display in willingness to accept any absurdity as true in explanation of the origin of Christianity. But in its later pages it is not laughter, but tears or a blush of shame,

which it is fitted to provoke by the bare recital of things that have been done, and are being done, by men called Christians; things that cannot be denied; things that are not the occasional relapses of individuals, but the deliberate acts of nations, done by their governments, approved by their parliaments, endorsed by their peoples, blessed by their churches; things that are as alien to the spirit of Jesus Christ as the treachery which betrayed Him, the malice which seized Him, the poltroonery that suffered Him to be crucified. When one sees such things done, permitted, condoned, within Christianity, the riddle of its continuance presses for consideration. Its power to survive such base betrayals and recover its pristine lustre produces a perplexity which staggers its opponents and delights its loyal adherents, whenever they take time to observe it. It makes them feel with renewed force that Gamaliel's second alternative strikes the nail on the head. This is of God. That is why neither false friends nor open foes can destroy it. A review of some of the facts of this extraordinary recuperative power of Christianity may help

the faith of some who are troubled by many depressing features of Christendom in the present day.

1. Look at it along the line of history.

What a chequered career Christianity has had! It has lived over again the experience of its Founder. Just as Herod's jealousy endangered Him in His obscure cradle, just as He had traitors within the circle of the twelve, and His own household did not believe in Him, just as the official heads of the people combined to crush Him, so His cause from its cradle has had to fight for its life, and has found some of its most bitter opponents where it had a right to look for friends. Nothing can exceed the marvel of its early growth. It was literally true, 'no weapon formed against it' prospered. Scorn, slander, persecution, were all employed from without. From within came attacks more insidious, as pride of intellect and extravagance of imagination sought to exploit the person of the Redeemer and the work of redemption in the interest of an irreverent curiosity. At Rome it had hardly brought Classic Paganism to an end, when it was exposed to all the rigour of

an encounter with the Teutonic heathenism. At Constantinople it degenerated into a mere baptized idolatry, worshipping relics and pictures and saints, and throughout the East was powerless to resist the needed protest of Mohammedanism, which simply robbed it of its adherents by the cityful. Where it survived the worldliness and viciousness of the rank and file, the general failure even to attempt conformity to its high code of living led earnest souls to exclaim that it was impossible to live a Christian life in the world's atmosphere of death, and to take flight to the hermit's cell or the vows of the monastery in the hope of achieving success there. Down through the dark ages religion seems only to survive in a few choice souls like Tauler and the mystics, like Thomas à Kempis and the brothers of the common life, like Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic, while the only aspects of Christianity that seemed to appeal to the populace at large were the fantastic and barbaric expeditions of the crusades. What was called the Church at its very centre in Rome was a hotbed of the vilest iniquity, the scene of vices and crimes that are unspeak-

able. You simply cannot paint the picture too black. And all this under the name of Christianity. But on the back of this came the Reformation. All along there was a deep undercurrent of protest, a growing indignation at the travesty of Christ's faith. Again and again it found spasmodic expression in Culdees and Lollards, in Waldenses and Albigenses, in men like Jerome of Prague and Huss of Bohemia, in Arnold of Brescia and Savonarola. And at last Luther arose and Melanchthon, Zwingli and Calvin, Knox and Latimer and Ridley. And with tongue and pen, at Imperial Diet and the martyr's stake, they said this blasphemy must cease. Christ spoke afresh. The Spirit appeared in new activity. Christianity arose from the dust. Jerusalem put on her beautiful garments. And something of its pristine simplicity and lustre returned to the cause of Jesus Christ.

How was that possible? Do not say that it was simply one of the side-issues of the Renaissance, one of the many fruits of the sack of Constantinople by the Turks, which scattered far and wide the stores of classic lore that had all lain hidden there. On the

contrary, these were the very influences with which Christianity had to begin a new conflict. If credulity and superstition had vanished, the age of self-sufficient culture had begun, for there is a side of culture that is subversive of religious faith, that poses as itself religion enough for man. And in Hume and the Deists, Voltaire and the Infidels, Goethe and the Neopagans, you find influences with which Christianity has once more had to fight for its life. The great outburst of science and invention and commerce of the last century, in which the nations of the West really began to get the full good of the new world which discoverers had brought to their door, became a great temptation to men to find their all in the things of the earth. And in the mad rush of all to share in the spoil, mammonism has grown rampant. Competition, Adam Smith's gospel of the *Wealth of Nations*, crushes generosity out of the heart of trade, and the co-operations, unionisms, and combines that seem to promise something better, being animated by the same desire for merely earthly good, help but little against the old *régime*. And the nineteenth century closes in

despair. And there we stand to-day in this country amid widespread indifference to all that speaks of strenuous endeavour, nobler ideals, brotherly kindness, and the practice on a wide scale of the golden rule. Their very leaders have to tell the working men that 'latterly the workers'—I quote from a recent speech by John Burns—'had become arrogant and fond of domination. They were mistaking bigness of territory for greatness of national life; they were mistaking violence for strength, conceit for capacity. If they wished to justify the hopes and predictions of the enemies of democracy, let them continue as they were now going.' And meantime we have a growing Home Mission problem, churches ill-attended, thousands, millions utterly careless as to religion in town and country, where once there was a devout community. Are we on the eve of the death of Christianity? No. Look back over that very time and you will see extraordinary evidences of its recuperative power. To keep to our own land, there was the great religious upheaval under Wesley and Whitfield. There was the great missionary movement under Carey, growing in volume

all down the century. There were the great revivals under Brownlow North and M'Cheyne and Moody. There is life still. It is what Christianity can give that our age needs. And it 'shall not die but live and show forth the praises of our God.' It is an impressive spectacle, as reassuring as it is depressing. How do you account for it?

2. Let us state the matter in another way.

Christianity is a body of truth, a standard of life, an attitude of soul. In each of these connections Christianity has shown remarkable vitality, power of growth and recovery.

Thus in the case of Christian truth. In a superficial way one might be tempted to ask, is there really such a thing as truth that can be called Christian? To say nothing of the many divisions of Protestantism, look at the great deep cleavage and divergence of Greek Church and Latin Church, of Catholic and Protestant. Which is Christian truth? Or if you say no one of them and yet all, does that not amount to this, that anything or nothing may be called Christianity, from the bald rationalism of a Unitarian to the multitudinous decrees and accretions of Romanist Councils and Bulls?

And yet Christianity is something very definite. There is a great broad platform of belief where the most widely separated can take their stand and say, 'over all this we are at one. This is Christian truth.' Gradually its essentials have emerged into clearness and increasing fulness, as the Church of Christ has seen more and more of the fulness there is in Christ. Christian truth is a bigger thing, consciously includes more to-day, than it did in the days of Clement of Rome and Ignatius and Polycarp. And do not let that cause surprise. Have you never felt something of the truth of that when you have heard the Apostles' Creed? 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy

Catholick Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body, and the Life everlasting. Amen.' It is so full with reference to the nature of God and the person of Christ, and so meagre when it comes to speak of the way of redemption. Why is it? Because it was not till the days of Augustine and Anselm that men were beginning to ask the questions that have helped us to see the mystery of redemption, and out of the play of opinion this way and that, they have arrived at a consensus that corresponds with all the facts. Why does it say so little of the Holy Spirit and of the place and nature of faith? Because not till the Reformation were men forced to discover the essential truth about these matters. And so the Church has grown to a larger and fuller knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. And the process of growth is one of which we often hear the formula in our own day,—'back to Christ,'—not 'back to Christ' letting drop all that others have learned of Him, but 'back to Christ' to test the accuracy of their learning and to learn direct from Him still more.

In the field of morals, the conception of the Christian life, we can see similar growth through criticism and experience. I do not know anything more difficult to describe than the nature of the Christian life, law and yet not law, obedience and yet liberty, stern adherence to the dictates of conscience, a separation from the world that knows no compromise, and yet a genial breadth that accepts and uses every gift of God with a thankful heart. Now one and now another element has predominated. At what they believed to be its dictates men have fled the company of their fellows, or forsworn all earth's kindliest relations, or persecuted those who differed from them to the death, or lived the austere strenuous life of the Puritan and Covenanter, or enjoyed *Wein, Weib, und Gesang* with Luther. Its whole spirit has at times been belied by men and nations who professed the creed. The Turks say that the Christians kept faith with them in not a single treaty which they have made. Slavery has flourished within its pale. Drunkenness, gambling, prostitution, are hideously common in Christian lands. War is not only condoned, but enthusiastically

approved by followers and preachers of the Prince of Peace. Social and economic conditions are allowed to prevail which make the sordidness and misery of savage life pale before the destitution and squalor of Christian cities. And men who are most loyal to the spirit of Christian brotherhood are branded, like Tolstoi, as heretics, and put under the ban. And yet in spite of all this the Christian conception is asserting itself; the Christian conscience is getting to truer light; and out of the chaos we are moving to a life divine, an imitation of Christ, a kingdom of God and the Spirit.

Once more under the spell of the sensuous and the formal, the very essence of the spirit of Christianity has seemed about to disappear. Ornate ritual, elaborate ceremonial, impressive architecture, music, painting, sculpture, vestments, incense, have all been magnified as of first importance for fellowship with God. Priest and sacrament have been interjected as indispensable mediators between the soul and God, until in the ritual of the Mass, or in fasting morning communion in Anglican churches, it is impossible to see any thing to

correspond with the simple rite of the Lord's Supper, or the simplicity of a religion that worships a God who is a Spirit in spirit and in truth. But Christianity has survived such perversions and suffocations before, and will do so again. For the soul grows weary of mummery, and the craving for reality and spirituality triumphs. And by the well of Samaria men meet Christ Himself, and want no other element to make the spot a shrine. 'Faith has still its Olivet, and Love its Galilee.'

3. There then, in its various aspects, is the perplexity. How comes it that in spite of opposition, perversion, betrayal, Christianity persists, refuses to succumb and disappear? Is it enough to say with Blackie, 'Christianity addressed itself to the world with the triple advantage of a reasonable dogma, a tremendous moral force, and an admitted historical basis. Hence its triumph. All parties might claim a part in a religion which was as spiritual as Plato, as moral as Socrates, as theological as Zeno, as historical as Julius Caesar.' What we have just seen is that at all these points it has suffered perversion at the hands of men who

wanted a religion but wanted none of these things, neither high thinking nor high living. And yet Christianity does persist! Must not the explanation be that it is because it has in it the breath of God? Must it not be that because at its very core there is the Spirit of God, men cannot, in spite of all the deluge of antagonism, misrepresentation, and faithlessness, drown or defile its pure existence. Its extraordinary recuperative power is an argument for the reasonableness of its claims to be divine. There is something in Coventry Patmore's (himself a Roman Catholic) rail at the Romish priesthood, that a religion which can survive their perfidy and viciousness must be from God.

If you ask me, therefore, how does Christianity persist, my reply must be that it is because in Christ you have reached the full and final revelation of God, and that however men may try to evade it, deny it, shirk the life to which it calls, it returns with renewed vigour to assert its claims and demand allegiance. No other religion has shown such extraordinary recuperative power. Where is the religion of Egypt or Babylon? Where are

the worshippers of Zeus and Athene, of Jupiter and Mars and Venus? Gone, gone for ever. Only in one land do I know of anything with which to compare the experience of Christ's religion. Go to India and there you will find to-day the religion, or what claims to be the religion, that flourished hundreds of years before the Christian era. This they will tell you has seen a great revival. Long ago their ancient faith burned low, and there came a great apostacy and falling away from Brahma to Buddha, and all India owned his sway. But the old faith revived and Buddhism was banished from the land of its birth, its shrines, and its holy places, to the deserts of Thibet and the plains of China, and all men returned to Brahma, and Vishnu, and Krishna, and Seva. And that is true. But what a return! Not like the return of Christianity, after the protest of Mahometanism and the depths of Satan in the Papacy, to the pure simple faith of Luther and the Reformers, but to a phase of heathenism in which all that was good in the old faith was hopelessly lost, and what was revived was only deformity and depravity worse than the worst that was before. And so

this is not a comparison but a contrast, not regeneration, but degeneration, not the recuperative power of persistent life, but the return in flood of malarial poison when the drains that had freed the marsh became old and useless.

Christ Himself is the secret of the perennial vitality of His religion. This is seen in its marvellous power of accommodation into whatever age or land it comes. In the palace of the Caesars, among the Barbarians by the banks of the Rhine, among Franks, and Saxons, and Celts, in the Old World or the New World, in Africa, or India, or China, or Japan, wherever Christianity has gone, it has been able to establish affinities between men of all nations and itself. And why is this so? Not because it is amorphous, is prepared to accept anything within its pale, if only it will own its authority, *à la* Satan's offer of the kingdoms of this world to Christ, a plan which was faithlessly and fatally adopted by Roman Catholic and Jesuit missionaries in China and Japan three centuries ago; with what results we know. No. Its capacity to spread and assimilate itself to men of all nationalities the

world over, adjust itself to them while remaining true to itself, is due to the fact that it treats men as men in their great common needs and feelings, perplexities and aspirations; brings an answer direct from God to the questions that rise from every soul of man, Jew or Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free. Where it is absorbed it asserts itself, true to Christ's figure, like leaven hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened.

Another factor accounts for its persistence. The surface currents often show strange aberrations. It is this spectacle that staggers us. These are the unsightly disfigurements that mar its record and belie its character, and force from many a weary Elijah the desolate cry, 'I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life.' But God showed him seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal. And so always the holy seed is the secret of the revival of Christianity. *Die Stille im Lande*, the quiet, godly, unobtrusive Christian men and women who have no talents, no gifts to sway the multitude, no way to make their mind or influence felt, but who are

strong in faith and prayer, exercise an influence which the world ignores while it yields to it. Like the praying societies in Scotland after the Revolution settlement, like the Pietists in Germany, and the Moravian brethren, there are always humble men and women with whom the Spirit finds a welcome abode, whom He moulds, and forms, and nourishes. And when the faithless world discovers its mistake and awakens aghast to the folly of its neglect of Christ's benignant *régime* and gracious offers, through these saintly souls streams forth afresh the living water to bring healing and comfort to repentant hearts. We forget these patient, silent servants of God. Men mock at their strictness, their prim, simple, unworldly ways. Men laugh and mock as they ride rough-shod over plaintive pleas for God's law, and day, and word. But the time comes when these despised men and women are all in all to the land. They are the salt of the earth and preserve it from ruin. And in them lurks the germ of life, pure, fresh, vital, from which Christianity, in spite of all its vicissitudes, ever springs back into bloom and beauty. That is

how Christianity persists. Because Christ persists, lives for ever, because the Holy Spirit is given and abides for ever, and because there is ever a loyal, humble band of believers who steadily and quietly own no king but Jesus Christ.

# WHY ARE CHRISTIANS INCONSISTENT?

'And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?'—Our Lord Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER V

### WHY ARE CHRISTIANS INCONSISTENT?

WHY are Christians inconsistent? The text on the opposite page shows us that Christ Himself asked that question, addressed it directly to His would-be adherents. Paul pressed it with startling force upon his readers at Rome. The world asks it, to gloat over it. The Christian, the sincere Christian, out of the shame of conscious failure, and in sincere remorse, asks it of himself. Why are Christians, why am I, inconsistent?

There is no dispute about the fact. It is just as glaring as Dr. Gustavus Aird put it. 'Some people,' he said, 'seem to me to be like the duck. To-day you see it disporting itself in the pure water of lake or river, as if purity was its supreme delight. To-morrow you see the very same creature guzzling in the foulest gutter over head and neck. What can you

call a creature like that?' I do not know, but you call the people like it a disgrace to the name they bear. But there is inconsistency that is not so flagrant, yet quite as perplexing, quite as distressing, and none the less pernicious because it is sometimes unsuspected by the very men that are guilty of it. How are such men so blind? How is it that they do not discover the cleavage in their own lives? No wonder this moral problem, this curious aberration, obliquity, and blindness perplexes men themselves when they discover it, perplexes observers where they see it, and proves a stumbling-block to many an earnest, sensitive soul.

1. But yet, why should it do so? Why do we set so much store by consistency?

We get an answer to that question if we take note that the demand for consistency in the Christian life is only part of a natural craving that exists in every sphere. It is the craving for harmony, symmetry, completeness. And the reason for that craving is that we feel that without it things will not last, things will not stand. Without it you have a kingdom divided against itself, and that kingdom can-

not stand. It does not matter whether it be a kingdom of men or the kingdom of Satan, the principle holds good. It is easily seen in the kingdom of art, or in the kingdom of thought. A piece of music is ruined by discords. A painting repels if it is a mass of harsh contrasts. You pay no heed to the most persuasive tones if you detect a flaw in the logic of a man's thinking. That defect brings the whole palace of words to the ground. And it is because consistency is just the word which suggests at once this correspondence of part with part, and the beauty and strength and coherence that come from it, that when we come to consider life as a whole we demand it there.

There is, too, a logic of life. It goes deeper than the mental processes. Its premisses are thoughts and emotions and decisions of the will and adhesions of faith, and its conclusions are deeds. And the master in this school is he whose thought corresponds with his act, his character with his creed. If he cannot stand that test he is an impostor. We cannot rely on him. The logic of his life is at fault. It does not hang together.

There is an art of life. 'The beauty of holiness' is a mistranslation, but the phrase expresses a great truth. Holiness, or wholeness, suggests life in its perfection, healthy and complete, toward God and toward man. And the beauty of it expresses exactly the impression which the sight of such a life makes upon our mind. Lives like this are the lives of saints. To think of them is to think of something like the lily or the evening star. Beautiful souls they are, whose inner life transfigures the homeliest features. They have learned the art of life; everything is consistent; part corresponds to part; and we admire. They have produced the beauty of holiness.

Now our demand for consistency is just the outcome of this instinctive craving, and the craving itself is a testimony from within our own hearts that there is an art of living, there is a logic of life, a right and a wrong way of it, a way that is wholesome and sane and beautiful, and a way that is ruinous and mad and ugly, which no sophistry can obscure. It is an argument from within our own breasts for the supreme place which God ascribes to

righteousness, extorted from us even when we fall short of it or deliberately deny it. It is a protest our better nature puts in against our truant traitorous selves, on behalf of the holy lives to which we are called in Christ.

2. But what is the inconsistency that is of mortal power, and which at all costs we must avoid?

A man may claim to be an artist, and paint daubs to the disgust of his friends. But they do not call him a bad man on that account. A man's reasoning may be as defective as Captain Bunsby's, but that will not close the gates of heaven against him. There is a seeming inconsistency which is in truth the consistency of progress in contrast to the consistency of stagnation, and this we can only admire. There is the glaring contrast between the life of a man after a true conversion and before, which we desire and expect. None of these concerns us.

But here are others which are serious. When a man, who has early seen the light, goes back on every principle he has advocated in these early days, and all the while professes to stand for consistency, that man is a menace to

morality. We are not greatly concerned about the man whose conduct is better than his creed; we may feel that it exposes the falsity of his creed and should lead him to abandon it; and we may be amazed at the mental twist which prevents him from seeing this; but we take the man on the basis of his life, estimate him by his heart, and let his head go. But the case is very different when the creed which a man professes calls for one thing, and he gives another wofully at variance with it. It is tragic when a man professes to believe in Christ, but his life is persistent obedience to the devil. It is fatal to all peace of mind, is utterly misleading as to the true character of salvation through Christ, when a man professes to take forgiveness and righteousness as a gift from God, but lives out his life in the spirit of a slave, as if his share in heaven's bliss depended on the price in good works he may pay into heaven's treasury. But here is a case more serious still. A man professes to have seen the evil of his ways. He has cried to God for pardon for the sake of the Saviour who has died for him. He says he owes all to Christ. He says he

loves Christ. He calls Him Master and Lord. But when, though Christ says, as he knows, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' 'Love your enemies,' 'Forgive as you have been forgiven,' 'Care for the poor,' 'Spread the kingdom,' 'Take up your cross and follow me,' he deliberately treats all that as if it were of no importance, and lives out his life in the selfish, resentful, contemptuous, cruel ways of the world, or with a calculating determination to swear by God and serve the devil, that puts the frivolous indifference of the worldly utterly into the shade; or when he lives a double life, all piety and philanthropy in the public eye, all drunkenness and devilry and debauchery under the night-light of secrecy, here is something which inconsistency is too weak a word to describe. But the very power for evil in it is almost gone. It is so revolting that even those who fain would use it to bring discredit on Christianity feel it is too gross, like Belial's suggested temptation of Christ, which even Satan saw was bound to fail by its excess. It does work ruin, but only in one direction, ruin utter and complete to the man's own soul.

3. Without reaching that hideous length, the lives of Christians do exhibit many and many a deviation from the claims of Christ—rifts in the lute. They are a grief to Christ, a handle to His enemies, an excuse for His ignorers, and a perplexity to ourselves. So having cleared the ground, let us ask directly why are we—we Christians—inconsistent? Why do we profess one thing and do another. And especially—for this is what differentiates in the public mind an inconsistency from a failure—why are we guilty of failures and won't admit them, pose as men who are right with Christ, refuse to admit we are wrong, do differently from what He plainly enjoins and yet feel no sense of shame, utter no cry, 'I have sinned'? That is what the world cannot stand. These are what Marie Corelli calls the Sorrows even of Satan. It is the contemptibleness of the whole situation that makes inconsistency so repulsive, the incapacity to say what are admittedly the five hardest words in the English language, or indeed in any language into which you may translate them, 'I have made a mistake.'

Why are we inconsistent? For one thing,

it is because we are so prone to put right opinion above right conduct, orthodoxy before orthopraxy, creed before conduct, creed above character. But that itself is an inconsistency. It is to divorce what God has joined together. Of course you will tell me that creed determines conduct. And it should, I admit. What we are concerned about just now is just this, that it does not; men profess to believe one thing and do another. And we shall never get quit of that till we recognise that our true creed is not what we repeat with our lips, but what we are prepared to try, at least, to act upon. And if the acting is not to degenerate, to become mechanical, a task, if it is not to grow irksome and engender within itself a desire to shirk the doing of it, we must keep the faith alive, must guard against its degenerating into a mere form of words, must constantly maintain that touch with Christ by which alone the electric current of eternal life will flow in and keep obedience and allegiance sweet.

Then again we often play ourselves a strange trick. Mrs. Browning puts it in this way; describing a man she says of him:

> 'He set his virtues on so raised a shelf,
> To keep them at the grand millennial height,
> He has to mount a stool to get at them ;
> And meantime, lives on quite the common way,
> With everybody's morals.'

Hence comes many a shock. You hear a man talk of the supremacy of principle, complain of the low level at which men are content to live, rail at fashion and conventionality and compromise, at extravagance and hurry. He demands high thinking and low feeding, less of time, less of the world, and room for eternity, room for God. But, alas, you discover it is his own life he has railed at. It is inconsistent. But that is not the whole story. The raillery is half-confession, the appeal of a shamefaced soul feeling out for a hand to help him to be the man he would like to be. Oh, that such hands might touch God's! Men are spell-bound by the sublimity of the Christian ideal. They are drawn up by it as by a magnet while their eyes rest on Christ. They seem to get wings and rise above the world till their feet scarce touch Mother Earth. But they think this life is something too refined for earth, which still must be dealt with on its own grosser terms. They forget where Christ dis-

played the perfect pattern, and they trip and fall because they forget that Christ took not on Him the nature of angels but the seed of Abraham, and He wants the heavenly life practised here, not kept as a fond conceit for heaven.

But there is a grosser ground for inconsistency. It is simply this, that we still allow the world to bulk so largely in our hearts. We are still so set on the things of time. We are still so kindly towards the old Adam, so strange and formal towards the Spirit of God. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life persist. And where Christ's law crosses them, they make us restive, make us stumble and fall. The rarity of our visits to Calvary, the neglect of secret prayer, unfamiliarity with communion with God, lack of faith, these all account for inconsistency. We are afraid to let go the world. We are not content to have Christ and nothing more.

4. The reason why we should think of a subject like this is that Christianity suffers so much through inconsistency. Yet in its condemnation the critics forget some points they should recall. One reads Burns's 'Address to

the Unco Guid,' and can only endorse the counsel of some of its verses. But if the world puts in its pleas with the saints, the saints have a right to ask the world to judge of them on the same principles. They ask on their own behalf,

'Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman;
Though they may gang a kennin' wrang,
To step aside is human:
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving Why they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us;
He knows each chord—its various tone,
Each spring—its various bias:
Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it:
What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted.'

We do not deny the inconsistencies. We do not palliate them or excuse them, but we do put in this plea on behalf of the Christian, that the man who is professedly trying to be a better man, who is honestly fighting against sin, should at least be treated as generously

in the matter of his failures as the man who makes no pretence of trying to overcome the world, but is content to make it his standard. Christianity is not magic. Under its influence men are born again, are made new creatures. But the new creature is made out of the old, and it wants much manipulating by the Spirit of God before deformities disappear, atrophied members recover vitality, erratic movements of heart and mind and will are disciplined to orderly service of Jesus Christ, conformed entirely to His image. As Robert Louis Stevenson said, 'We are not meant to be good in this world, but to try to be, and fail, and keep on trying, and when we get a kick, to say, Thank God! and when we get a buffet, to say, Just so; well hit.' Here, after all, saints are only saints in the making. Christ was the only perfect Christian. His followers are but approximations. And as for their imperfections, their deviations from the rule, what men call their inconsistencies, as Ruskin says, 'Imperfection is in some sort essential to all we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body.' Indeed he goes so far as to say that they have been, in some cases, 'divinely

appointed, that the law of life may be effort, and the law of human judgment mercy.'

There is this to be said, too. Make sure that what you call inconsistencies in another really are so. That is to say, do not judge the failures of another by your standard, but by his own. Ah! but you say, we have a common standard. It is Christ's. Yes, but my understanding of Christ and yours may not tally. Your long and mature experience of the bearings of Christ's rule has let you see how it applies in fifty directions where my brief acquaintance has never yet perceived it. Your continued practice of the Christian life has made you sensitive to its demands in a score of cases where I do not yet recognise it. All the more reason therefore, you say, why I should court your criticism and guidance; and probably you are right. But if I am young and raw and unaccustomed to the yoke, it is one of the most difficult things, needing the grace of seasoned faith and mature spirituality, humbly to assent to that. I fancy that as yet I must learn my own lesson, and direct from Christ, without your interference. And it is in fear of disloyalty to Him that I waive

you aside. And you must not hastily call that inconsistency. I know no better. But I am learning. And God knows that. God allows for that. He is patient. He welcomes the effort; He bears with the defect.

> 'All that men missed in me;
> All I could never be;
> That was I worth to God.'

Besides, is nothing to be allowed for this? When a Christian, a true Christian, is frankly and honestly brought face to face with his own inconsistencies, he will be his own severest critic. No one will feel them more than he. And his growth in the knowledge of Christ and of life in Christ, and in the knowledge of himself as seen in the light of Christ, will be a series of surprises and discoveries that will bring pangs of self-reproach and regret, and tears of penitence and shame. It is Peter and his denial over and over again,—'When he thought thereon he wept bitterly.' When he sees his inconsistency in its true character, he knows right well its pernicious influence. He knows it spells not only disloyalty to Christ but indifference to Christ engendered in the hearts of others, and hearts hardened

against His cause. And his own disgrace is as nothing to him compared with the wrong it has done his Saviour. It is a small thing to him that men point at him as inconsistent. But it is a serious thing that on his account men think less of his Saviour, even doubt if He deserves that name. That cuts him to the heart; that brings him to his senses. And those who are staggered by the inconsistencies should not think the last word about them has been said till it has been seen how they affect the man himself when they have been brought home to him. For the scandalised have a duty by the inconsistent man, whose inconsistencies they have detected, whoever they be, friends or foes, before they either proclaim them to others or finally characterise them to themselves. They must go and tell him of his fault between them and him alone, let him see the injury his conduct is working on their souls. If they do, it may be Corinth convicted over again: 'Godly sorrow that worketh repentance not to be repented of. What carefulness it wrought, yea what clearing of themselves, yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what vehement desire, yea what zeal,

yea what revenge!' Unless the scandalised have tried for that result and failed, it is of little moment to keep harping on inconsistencies and the scandal of them. They are only adding one to the sum of them.

But when all is said, inconsistencies are a grief and a snare. I do not wonder they perplex young Christian souls, are a stumbling-block in the path of men who would be Christians. The true solution of this difficulty is a practical one. The explanation of the cause is not defect in the redemptive power of the Spirit of God. It is in the hardness of men's hearts which yield so slowly to redeeming grace. Grace works not by magic but by constant regard for man's powers of heart and will, and for his own ultimate responsibility for the use of these powers. But would not the case at any rate be relieved, you ask, if those only were used of God for the advancement of the kingdom in whom there were no such grave defects? Why are men used and blessed and honoured by saving souls, whom another view exposes as marred by inconsistency? And what you say seems plausible, and we chime in 'Why'? But we think a moment,

and then we see where that leads. God would be left without an agent. 'There is none righteous, no, not one.' God has to take what He can get, put up with what distresses and perplexes. We are all such poor creatures, even at our best.

We have studied a serious problem, an inquirer's difficulty, a world's difficulty, that leaves Christ's people with a convicted sore heart. For the Christian himself the solution should be practical. Let us be better bairns, humbler Christians, more loyal to Jesus Christ, and this source of perplexity will be reduced to a minimum so far as we are concerned.

# WHY KEEP SABBATH?

'If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.'—JEHOVAH.

## CHAPTER VI

### WHY KEEP SABBATH?

THE Sabbath, in spite of the boon it has proved to men, is recurrently the object of determined efforts to break down the sentiment of respect and reverence for its hours. Liberty, reason, common sense, are all appealed to on the side of laxity and the secularising of it. Narrow-mindedness and bigotry are the common terms used to describe the spirit of those who uphold its sanctity, with the insinuation that mixed up with it is a large amount of hypocrisy and spiritual pride. Christian men need to face that fact, and, in doing so, they should bear this in mind, that the real instigators of these movements—whatever their dupes and cat's-paws may be, through whom they seek to secure their ends with the public—are men who have no sympathy with the Christian religion. They have witnessed the failure of

assaults along the old lines of scepticism and secularism; and so the attack is diverted in a new direction. Christianity is assailed through one of its most valued institutions.

But Christian men have to face another fact. That attack, of which I have just spoken, does not account for the large amount of pleasure-seeking on Sabbath by thousands of men and women. These pleasure-seekers have no serious thought about Christianity. They simply are indifferent to it. And that indifference is very often begotten of earlier indifference to the Sabbath, shown in many cases by professedly Christian men, which has led them to utilise its hours for purposes of work—work of repair, work to be done in a hurry, or under pressure, said to be necessary. I am free to say that in hundreds of cases the necessity is a manufactured, and not a genuine, necessity—a necessity arising from unwillingness to miss a day from the pursuit of wealth, not a necessity of urgency that cannot brook delay without serious damage to valuable plant, or to the health and lives of man and beast. There is no more necessity, for instance, for a manufacturer to do repairs to machinery on Sabbath

than there is for a shopkeeper to have his shop painted or cleaned on Sabbath. But the one is as common as the other is rare. There is no more need for the despatch of letters on Sabbath than there is for their delivery. There is no more necessity for trains to run on Sabbath than there was for stage-coaches; indeed, there is far less, when, with our facilities of travel, we can cover in an hour what took a day seventy years ago. And it is this work on Sabbath, and work like it, that has bred the indifference that now uses the day, when not claimed for work, as no longer a day to be kept for worship, but used, if we please, for recreation and play.

Now, the plea that this use of the day for amusements, for concerts in the parks, cycles on the roads, golf on the links, is not only reasonable, but laudable, is backed up by a very specious argument. We are asked if that is not a very much better way of spending Sabbath than lounging in club-rooms, drinking and smoking, or than the way it is spent by thousands of young men and women, laughing and larking, with an utter lack of manly reserve or womanly modesty

and self-respect, which are the first steps towards degradation and shame. And I say at once, of course it is. But that is nothing to the purpose for a Christian man. The cure for a grosser form of desecration is not a milder form of it. A man who does not believe in the elevating power of the gospel, the sole ultimate elevating power of the Spirit of Christ, may reasonably enough resort to music and pictures and sports to effect an improvement which he feels—and all credit to him for the feeling—sorely needed, but for a Christian that is a counsel of despair. It is a virtual confession of the insufficiency of the spiritual forces, and if he knows what his Christianity really means, he can never assent to that.

I do not say but that the Church may have its share in the blame for the present state of affairs. If the young men and women who spend their Sabbaths in indolence and frivolity have grown up in Christian homes, there is grave cause for heart-searching on the part of parents, as to the way in which they have taught their children to regard the day—not by what they have said, but by their example; by the use they have made of its hours in their

homes, and by the influence—or none—which it has left on their life in the rest of the week. If they have been taught in our Sabbath Schools, it is a serious thing for our teachers and superintendents. If they are worshipping part of the day in our Churches, it is a serious thing for ministers, and equally serious for them and for the whole Christian community if they are not. How have men and women been taught to regard the Sabbath? As an end in itself, or only as a means to a still higher end? Have they been led to think they have done their duty, when they have carefully banished work from its hours, spent a part of it in the forms of worship, and the rest in a reading, it may be quite mechanical, of a certain class of books, and all out of respect for the Sabbath? Or, have they had kept ever before them that the Sabbath is only God's provision to supply a most valuable aid to a great and sublime result? It is a day set apart, and all the institutions associated with it, not for its own sake, but to further and facilitate intercourse with God. This is its true purpose for which it was made; the other is mere Pharisaism. And if we degenerate

into Pharisaism, we have only ourselves to blame if healthy, honest natures turn from it sooner or later in disgust.

Sabbath desecration, the abuse which is described in the words in Isaiah, 'doing thine own ways, speaking thine own words, finding thine own pleasure,' is a symptom of a disease. This is true, whether the neglect of the day takes place along the line of using it for work or of using it for play. Work on Sabbath shows two things:—on the part of employers chiefly, but partly also on the part of the men, greed of gain, the worship of Mammon; and on the part of the men chiefly, but also to some extent on the part of their masters, spiritual cowardice, want of faith in God. The man who employs men to work on Sabbaths is simply a worshipper of Mammon. He may be trying to serve two masters, God and Mammon, though Christ says so plainly he cannot. And this just shows how true are Christ's words. Mammon, the pursuit of wealth, says, 'If you want to make all you can out of your machinery, out of your employees, you must keep going all the seven days of the week. If you do not, others will get the pull

of you, be able to sell more and sell more cheaply, and you will lose money thereby.' God says: 'If you want to be as good a man as you may be and as I wish you to be, you must not let the world engross all your nature. I made you. I know what you need to keep your spiritual life alive. I know the time My spirit needs for free play in your heart, and you must give Me the Sabbath for that.' And in view of that, what the man does with the Sabbath shows whether God or Mammon is master in his heart. With the workman, work on Sabbath shows whether he is a spiritual coward or not, ready or afraid to trust God. Cowardice says, 'If you won't work, hundreds will take the job instead of you, and you will simply be thrown out altogether.' Faith says, 'There's a God that wants you to spend the Sabbath in fellowship with Him, because He knows that will serve the truest, deepest needs of your being, means eternal life for you. He knows you need food and clothes, so you may leave the question of where they are to come from to Him, if you are ready for any honest work on the other six days of the week, and will spend the seventh with Him.' And ac-

cording as a man works on the Sabbath or not, he shows whether he really trusts God or not. In each case, work demanded or work performed shows that God is not supreme in the life. The world and things of time are uppermost. It is a hard thing to say, but it is true. Sabbath work shows where the heart is. It follows the treasure, and that is on earth. Fellowship with God and all that means is regarded as a secondary consideration.

Play on Sabbath proves the very same thing, but in the reverse way. Here is a man who has no taste for spiritual things. However it has come about, spiritual things mean nothing to him. He does not know God. He never has found that sin was any burden to him, that Christ was a Saviour of any value, or the story of His marvellous salvation anything more than a very pretty fancy of the olden times, well enough for sentimental women, but of no significance for meeting the rough realities of life. There, what is most of all needed, he says, is a clear head, a good healthy constitution, and a not too shady character. The Hereafter, the Unseen, is a pure matter of speculation, and he is too practical to bother

about it. He has his free day on Sabbath, however, and what is he to do with it? The Church and all its institutions have no interest for him. Why not spend the day in the country, or hear a concert? It is not so slovenly as lounging all day in bed. And so he makes his Sabbath a holiday. And it is perfectly rational. But it proves the disease of which I speak—spiritual apathy, no taste for fellowship with God.

Now, let us recognise that. Let us drop the humbug that is talked about a rational way of spending Sabbath. It is not a question of rationality on one side and irrationality on the other. It is a question of what is the Christian use to make of a Christian institution. The Sabbath is a Christian institution. I recognise that it is not rational for a worldly man to spend the Sabbath in a way intended to foster a spiritual life of which he knows nothing and cares less. But he is simply throwing dust in your eyes when he talks about deriving as much good from a walk in the fields or a run on his cycle as from sitting for hours in a stuffy church listening to pious platitudes. What kind of good does he mean?

Spiritual good? Something that will make him holier, humbler, more ready for sacrifice? Or is it simply the sort of fillip you get from a holiday, a pipe, or a good dinner, which makes you a little more self-satisfied and comfortable, and so better pleased with things in general? Let us drop all humbug, I say. That is not the good the Christian wants, and it needs more than country air or a concert to bring him right into the presence of God and send him on his way with a new sense of His nearness, His anxiety over His children, His concern in them, His love for them—send him on his way more humbly, patiently, earnestly. Mountains and music at a time may help this, where the spirit exists, but they cannot produce it, or serve as a sole substitute for that which does. The springs of it lie in the Bible and in the Christ depicted there. There we see the glory of God manifested in the face of Jesus Christ in such a way as to rivet the affection and the faith of earnest men. And it is not a rational thing for men, who are really anxious to find the sweets of communion with God, to spend their Sabbath amid distractions, its few short hours in what only

reaches their fancy and their physical frames, in what does not directly aim at lifting their souls up to God. It is not a rational thing to seek the stars in a gas-lit room. It is not a rational thing to tell us that a Christian man needs holiday recreations on Sabbath to make his Sabbath profitable to him. It is arrant nonsense, as foolish as to expect a worldling to find delight in a meeting for prayer.

But since men work and since men play on Sabbath, and wish it so, have we Christians any right to object? Granting it is not what we do ourselves or wish to see, is not our duty to see that if work they will and play they will, it shall be under the best possible regulations, and so make the evil as slight as possible? It is a delicate question, but the answer lies here. So far as public institutions are concerned, we have a perfect right to refuse to allow these to be utilised in a way that is offensive to us and, as we believe, fundamentally injurious to the best interests of the community. But if this use is to mitigate a further evil, what then? The true way to the cure of an evil is not mitigation. It is often best in the first instance to let it come to a head and show itself in all

its offensiveness, that we may see it. And if there be something degrading, something that repels the better sense of even the natural man about the godless spending of the Sabbath, even as it is, let us learn the lesson which that teaches, and see where it ends. And all the more should we follow that course, if the cure that is proposed as a mitigation, as a ready remedy, is of a kind that may prove a serious temptation to those who have not yet fallen a prey to the disease. I do not believe that it is a probable sequence, from lazy lounging *via* bicycle and concert—open-air or in-door—to a sense of sin, conversion, fellowship with God, and love for the worship of His house. I do believe that in your middle stage, your amusements and diversions, there is a serious temptation away from a germinating interest in holy things on to utter worldliness. And so the cure to which a Christian man will look for restoral of the Sabbath to its proper place in the regard of men lies in another direction.

The supreme concern is to re-awaken in the community a real regard for God, a new sense of His transcendent Majesty and all-pervasive presence, a new sense of His infinite

claim upon the love and trust and regard of men, in view of the priceless gift of His Son and the salvation He hath purchased by His death on Calvary. We need a great revival of the conviction that there is a God with whom men have to do and to whom they are responsible, and at the same time the conviction that this God is willing to come into terms of the very closest intimacy with men, simply to flood their natures with the sense of His presence, and to afford them in Himself the most absorbing, satisfying subject of thought and affection. Awaken that, create the craving for that, and at once men will prize the Sabbath for worship, for sober meditation, and for fellowship with fellow-Christians and with God. But then the Sabbath itself is just one of the most precious opportunities for endeavouring to secure this result, and for keeping it in play when once it is in existence. The Sabbath, as it is, gives men who love the Lord an opportunity of leading their children, their friends, their fellowmen to loving thoughts of Christ, and that is the sequence of thoughts in the protasis and apodosis, as they are called, of this sentence: 'If thou shalt call the

Sabbath a delight . . . then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord.' If you prize the Sabbath, that is to say, for the purpose for which God has given it, a day claimed by Him, and to be spent for His service and glory, then you will find how truly the day thus spent helps your spiritual life, brings you nearer to God, makes God the more of a reality in your life. You will find the truth of the old proverb, 'A well-spent Sabbath brings a well-spent week.' To enforce the truth of this, to forestall objections that after all the Sabbath is a form that will be superseded as religion becomes more and more spiritual, every day a Sabbath, all work worship, I would remind you of two things. The one is the divine sanction for the Sabbath. It stands enjoined in the Ten Commandments, and, as we shall see immediately, it was constantly observed by our Saviour. God who knows our nature, who wishes all our life to become 'Holiness to the Lord,' tells us we need, to secure this, the special service of the Sabbath. The other is this—God's prophets and apostles, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Paul, those fierce iconoclasts of all mere forms, stay their hand at this form, let it stand, endorse it, enjoin

its observance. Why? Because here they saw something different from all other forms, one which in its simplicity and artlessness was of essential value for the nurture of the spirit. These masters in spiritual therapeutics and dietetics knew the Sabbath's value too well to let it go.

What are we to do then, as Christian men, when the Sabbath is assailed?

For one thing, we have a right and a duty to use our civil and political powers to conserve all that at present we enjoy. We have a right to insist that public institutions supported by public money shall not be employed for purposes which infringe on and pain our conscientious sentiments, and are, we are convinced, hostile to the real interests, physical, intellectual, moral, of individuals and of the nation as a whole. In private we must ourselves abstain from all use of it that is detrimental to the real ends for which a Sabbath exists. But, on the other hand, it is not enough to say, 'you are not to do this and not to do that.' All attempts at Christian casuistry proceed from a false idea of how conduct is to be regulated, which is by the

spirit and not by the letter. Rather we must set ourselves to turn its hours to the best account for the development of our own and our neighbour's spiritual faculties, and here you cannot arrive at any satisfactory result by a discussion of whether you must go twice to church or once or three times. You cannot decide offhand whether you should visit a friend or not, whether you may go for a walk or not, and so on. The question is, how do you regard your going to church? What do you talk about on your visit or your walk? There is a very striking phrase in a text in Isaiah descriptive of one of the things to be avoided—'Speaking *your own* words.' Or drop out the words in italics—'Speaking words.' It does not mean that we are to spend the day in silence, but what a great deal of useless irrelevant talk there often is on Sabbath by men and women severe enough on others for breaking and profaning the Sabbath in other ways. Vain conversation! Words that in no way help the spiritual life, words that play the part of the fowls of the air and carry off the good seed from the soil where it had fallen!

To know how to spend the day, we need to

learn a lesson from our Saviour and do as He did. His conduct follows two lines. (*a*) First, I am struck with the constancy of His attendance upon public worship. Nobody that takes the trouble to think of it can fail to notice the number of things we are told He said and did in the synagogues. Now, Sabbath was the day for worship there, so there Sabbath constantly found Him. And no man professing to be a follower of Christ can consistently neglect this example of regard for the services of the sanctuary. The house of God was Christ's delight. It was the place where He could worship His Heavenly Father along with His fellow-men, jointly with them recall the great truths that had come from God and had moulded the course of His people's past. It was the place where He could join in adoration and praise of the Great Lord of all. It was the place where He could tell men out of His unique experience what is the very essence of God's nature—love; what His ultimate desire and purpose—men's salvation. And He was eager for its great opportunity of circulating the truth about God, in an atmosphere where it would find a sympathetic

and joyful welcome and not a mere critical attention. And that is what the worship of the church should be to us on God's holy day. Worship, and not a mere opportunity for an æsthetic or intellectual treat or the reverse, according as the music or the sermon is rendered well or not,—that is the purpose of the Sabbath and the house of God.

But second, (*b*) All day was not spent in the synagogue. Our Lord dined with His friends. He healed sick men and women who came to Him and whom He went to see. He preached in the open air, or talked with His disciples as He took a walk with them through the fields. 'Ah yes, now, take note of that, no puritanical strait-lacing there.' Ay, but wait a bit. Let us be rational, as we are so often told to be. And if it was rational for Christ to refuse to treat the rubbing of corn in the hands as equivalent to running a threshing-machine, is it rational from that refusal to conclude that He sanctions threshing generally on the Sabbath or any other work? Because He healed the sick before Him, is it rational to conclude that He meant the Sabbath to be reserved for a sort of special weekly oppor-

tunity for attending to our bodily ailments, which we neglect through the rest of the week? Or because He dined with His friends that day and used their board for a happy opportunity to preach the Gospel with that wondrous tact by which He made the truth distil upon them in His words, are we to spend its hours in extra-sumptuous meals that lay extra burdens on servants, or wives, or daughters, preventing them from worshipping God, while our talk is all of the world and the things of time? Let us be reasonable, I say, and see what His action does mean. It means that the Sabbath gave Him a great opportunity when men were free from this world's activities, after conciliating them by kindly courtesy and timely help, to impress on them the things that concern their eternal peace. That is what Christ's action means. In effect, as the good old Shorter Catechism puts it, 'spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.' Or better still, with the Confession of Faith, treating the works of necessity and mercy as no exception, but an

integral part of the duties of the day. Oh, that there were such a love for God in our hearts that we would welcome the Sabbath for His sake! Oh, that there were such profit for all of us in the way we kept the Sabbath that we would love God the more for it! What men and women we would be in dignity of life, in humility of spirit, in genuine devoutness and Christ-likeness! The promise of Jehovah would be fulfilled for us, 'for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.'

# DID MIRACLES HAPPEN?

'This is the finger of God.'—THE MAGICIANS OF EGYPT.

## CHAPTER VII

### DID MIRACLES HAPPEN?

I AM doubtful if any definition of miracle is as successful in conveying what exactly is meant by the word as the saying of the magicians in Egypt. Time after time they had met the marvels of Moses by their own feats of legerdemain. At last came one with which they could not even pretend to cope. And they own themselves defeated; but why? Because here it is God with whom they must compete, not man, and they are not equal to it. 'This is the finger of God.' And a miracle is neither more nor less than this, an event in any sphere, physical or spiritual, out of the ordinary, beyond the power of man, and which you can only account for by the presence and direct activity of God, the intervention of God.

1. There was a time when the miracles recorded in connection with the Biblical narra-

tive, and especially the miracles wrought by Christ, were triumphantly appealed to as in themselves an argument and proof of the divine claims of Christianity. They were part of the armour of the apologist, a difficulty not to him, but to his opponents. Now, on the contrary, in many quarters they are a stumbling block to faith; not helps, but hindrances, to the acknowledgment of the claims of Christ, a perplexity to earnest souls. They are weapons used against the credibility of the Christian records, and the upholder of Christianity has to explain the presence of such divergences from the normal course of things in the very warp and woof of his faith.

It is worth while noticing how this change of things, this change of attitude towards miracles, has come about. (*a*) Partly it is the result of the influence of the wits and satirists to whom nothing is sacred, and who have even a malicious pleasure in travestying the cherished opinions of others, especially where these opinions have been dictatorially enforced and thrust down men's throats. Such spirits find their revenge in brilliant *tours de force*, rejoinders which they know will irritate and

annoy, and bring attention to themselves. And so you have called into activity a Lucian, a Voltaire, or a David Hume, with his seemingly common-sense deliverance, that 'a miracle is something so unlikely in itself that it is more probable that the report of it is false than that it can really have occurred.' This is plausible, and you feel it has to be answered. (*b*) Then there is an influence that is represented by another class of men, men whose attitude would give you to understand that they would much rather not be compelled to trouble you with the matter, would rather let you retain your faith in miracles undisturbed, but then in common honesty and as mere men of the world, they cannot get over this: as Matthew Arnold says, whatever may have happened in the past, 'miracles do not happen now.' How do you account for it? (*c*) Then again,—and this is perhaps the strongest force,—there is no doubt that miracles have become more of a problem with the growth of the scientific spirit, with the discovery of the secret of many things that previously were utterly mysterious, and with that the recognition of the everywhere prevalent reign of law throughout

physical nature. This has its good side. George Meredith suggests how it tamed Lucifer, when :—

> 'With memory of his old revolt from Awe
> He reached a middle height, and at the stars
> Which are the brain of heaven, he looked—and sank.
> Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
> The army of unalterable law.'

During the past century, in every department of natural philosophy and natural science nothing has been more remarkable than the steady discovery of the unvarying prevalence of laws in accordance with which physical nature uniformly acts. In dependence upon them, the most wonderful results have been secured. And one can understand how this leads men to say that there is no room left for miracle, and even, as Professor W. James says, to resent the suggestion of its possibility, because of 'dislike to admit any ultimate factor in things which may rout our prevision or upset the stability of our outlook.'

(*d*) Still further, Dr. Caird, the Master of Balliol, argues against miracles on this score, that 'the spiritual life is, or ought to be, its own evidence; and every secondary support

that can be given to it . . . must prove treacherous.' And Dr. Caird is right to remind us of the self-evidencing power of the spiritual. Thoughtful men will ask what proof is it that God is there, when Jesus cast out demons. Why not say with the Pharisees, 'He deceiveth the people.'

These four influences, then, have turned the drift of public feeling so that in many quarters there is a tendency to regard miracles not as a help to faith, but as a dead weight of which it would be wise in time of doubt to lighten the ship, and in any case to lay very little stress upon them.

2. But notice in reply, first of all, that all this is *à priori* argument. And one well-attested real miracle knocks the bottom out of the whole of it. And when we remember with regard to the Gospels, for instance, what grounds we have for trusting them, when we remember that Paul's Epistles give us first-hand evidence of the very strongest kind—there is nothing stronger in the history of antiquity—of the miraculous fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we feel that it is neither good science nor good sense to

try to belittle the significance of miracle on the ground of mere hostile presumption. It smacks of prejudice and bias, fatal defects in scientific inquiry.

(*a*) The whole question of the possibility of miracle turns on your view of God and the world. You can only assert beforehand that miracle is an inherent impossibility on one of two views of the world, as a plaything or as a machine. On the one hand miracles will be impossible in the world, if the world is the result of chance, a freak of a fortuitous combination of unaccountable atoms, and its history in every sphere the mere sport of caprice. Everything will then be so erratic that no one thing can be called miracle, wonder, more than another. But is that a rational or true account of the world? All science contradicts it. On the other hand, miracles will be impossible if the world is under the thrall, as the Greeks thought, of

> 'That power that rules us as with rods,
> Lord above Lords and God behind the Gods:—Fate.'

But it is to reduce the world to a prison-house, man to a slave, the sense of free will and

responsibility to a mockery, and God to no more than a County Court Judge or a Sheriff (as has been said) who can only administer laws, but neither make nor unmake them, if we conceive of the law which prevails throughout creation in any such mechanical fashion. Of course in such a world miracles would be impossible. But that is not the world we live in.

We live in a world in which law and order do prevail. But what do we mean when we speak of law in regard to nature? We mean that in every department of the physical universe there are certain well-defined lines along which things habitually and constantly move. But we know also that, up to a certain point, it is within the power of animate nature, and still more of rational animate nature, to control, supersede, or suspend the operation of these so-called laws without infringing or violating them. A beaver can build a dam across a river and check one of the results of the operation of the laws of gravitation. A man can take a brute in hand, and by training habituate it to become docile and serve him in ways the very reverse of its original habits. Departures these from the laws of nature, but

familiar to us all. And what they tell us is, that the laws of nature are really the general principles on which the world proceeds, but that there is nothing in these laws to prevent any higher power from suspending their action for a time, if need be, to serve some higher purpose. Given the power and the purpose, there is nothing in the constitution of the world, as we know it, to forbid such operation. But the very existence of such beautiful, symmetrical, harmonious action throughout the created universe proclaims the presence of such a power, a God who is not blind fate, but conscious intelligence. More than that, I say, in appeal to those who feel the spell of Christ's attractiveness and the high tone of His teaching, even while they are perplexed by His miracles, that He reveals a God who is more than even conscious intelligence, a God who is holy, fatherly love. And if that is so, is it not to ask us to stultify ourselves to insist that He shall be so trammelled by the laws of His own making that He cannot interfere with them to repair abuses that have crept in through the folly of men who have abused the freedom He bestowed upon them? The thing is absurd.

There is no impossibility. To fail to see that only betokens grave insensibility—

> 'Earth's crammed with heaven,
> And every common bush afire with God;
> But only he who sees takes off his shoes.
> The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries.'

As Mrs. Browning says in another place:—

> 'A Pagan, kissing for a step of Pan
> The wild goat's hoofprint on the loamy down,
> Exceeds our modern thinker who turns back
> The strata . . . granite, limestone, coal, and clay,
> Concluding coldly with "Here's law! Where's God?"'

But as Amiel says: 'Miracle is a perception of the soul, a vision of the divine behind nature . . . for the indifferent there are no miracles. It is only the religious souls that are capable of recognising the finger of God in certain given facts.' So you see that a world in which we recognise the presence of a living God at all, is a world where it is perfectly possible for miracles to happen.

(*b*) But I shall go farther, and say that there are circumstances in which it is natural to expect that miracles will occur, in which miracle actually becomes the probable.

We are under the spell of the observed

uniformity of the laws of nature just now. But we run the risk of allowing ourselves to be victimised by one side of the truth. That is not the only conviction that has impressed itself on the minds of men. There have been times when they have been just as deeply sensible of the probability of divine intervention. And in a world governed by God it is as rational to believe the one as the other. There are times when men feel that things have reached a crisis in the history of mankind, and that in the interests of all that is noble and true and good, it is essential that men's attention should be specially arrested, that they should be startled and compelled into serious thought about higher things, that things have passed beyond the control and capacity of even the most gifted mortals, and that to meet the situation God must intervene. Of course it is of the very essence of this expectancy that what it looks for is something temporary, to meet the emergency, and to pass with the passing of the need. And that disposes at once of such an objection as Matthew Arnold's, 'miracles do not happen.' Of course not. If they happened regularly, they would

cease to be miracles. It is of their very essence that they should be temporary. Having done their part, they cease. Having recalled men's attention to God, reminded them of His presence in the ordinary affairs of life and regular course of the world, having restored the injured scheme, effected a restitution of things, there is no more need for them. For as Sabatier says:—'God only manifests Himself in extraordinary events in order that we may recognise Him in ordinary ones.'

3. So now we have reached the proper point of view from which to look at the reported miracles. We have seen what are the possibilities and probabilities, and got rid of pseudo-scientific presumptions against them. We have found room for them should anything resembling them claim a hearing. And that this is no obscurantist attitude of timid orthodoxy you will see when I tell you it is upheld by Ruskin and Carlyle, even in reference to the raising of the dead, and by such thorough-going radical theologians as Harnack and Menegoz.

Let us look therefore in the light of what has been said at the Bible miracles, and since

we cannot look at them all, let us concentrate our attention on the most stupendous and important, those connected with the person and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is right to notice here that you cannot separate the miraculous from Jesus Christ. Miracles are inextricably present in the narrative. Jesus is Himself as miraculous as any wonder ascribed to Him, or any incident associated with Him. There is no re-agent that can precipitate the so-called fabulous, and leave only essential, limpid, ethical truth. All such attempted alchemy utterly ruins the original. But there is another side to this which explains the impossibility. There is a perfect homogeneity between the person and the life, the general character and the individual actions. If ever the miraculous seemed suddenly to have found its law, to have vindicated its place in the scheme of nature, and not only as a whole but in every particular to have satisfied expectancy, it was in the case of Jesus of Nazareth. When once you know Him and have entered into His Spirit, you feel that His miracles of healing and timely help in emergency, in which He exercised a matchless power of control

over laws of health and laws of physics, supernatural though they are, are simply natural in Him, because He throughout is supernatural. You feel that there is a logic of congruity that is quite irresistible in the utterance of Peter in reference to the inevitableness of His resurrection, 'it was not possible that He should be holden of death.' That would have been a violation of law, of higher law, before which the difficulties of a fish swallowing Jonah, or the sun standing still, sink into insignificance.

But there is more than homogeneity within the scope of Christ's experience and activity to make for probability. There is the urgency of the whole case which His coming was designed to meet. Law or no law, man was an abnormality. Account for the fact how you will, God's highest, holiest law of right and wrong had been outrageously violated by man,—a ghastly miracle from below, not from above,—a far more serious thing, believe me, than any interference with the byelaws, which in ordinary circumstances regulate earth's procedure but unswerving attention to which is just as little essential to its constitution as enforcement of mere byelaws ever is. And

the intervention of God in the person of Jesus Christ was to meet this crisis, to repair the damage, restore the fallen, save the situation. It was for this God sent His Son. And we are not surprised at the miracle, for only miracle could meet the need. But we adore the grace that wrought it.

But 'miracles do not happen now.' No, but that is no new discovery. The record of the early Church as we have it in the earliest books, our New Testament, takes us to a date when already miracles were a thing of the past. Is this not surprising? No. It is what we expect. What would have surprised would have been to find them as prolific in the days of Timothy and Titus as in the days of Jesus Himself. They had served their purpose. They had arrested men's attention. They had recalled their minds to God and the presence of God. The record is as we should expect it to be, if miracles really happened, and as we say they did. Why, even in the experience of Jesus Himself you find miracles, specially so-called, far more prolific in His earlier days than when the final crisis approached. They had served their purpose of arresting men's attention, and

the need for them grew less. For there is truth in the words of Dr. Edward Caird which I quoted, 'the spiritual life is, or ought to be, its own evidence, and every secondary support that can be given to it . . . must prove treacherous.' 'Is or ought to be.' Yes, but though it 'ought to be,' in fallen men it often is not. And they require to be compelled to give heed to its presence. They need a miracle to startle them into attention and teach them the lesson they are so slow to learn. They need to learn that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins by seeing a man at His word rise and walk. 'The spiritual life ought to be its own evidence.' But with unspiritual natures often it is not. And they need other evidence to awaken their minds. When this result is attained, the miracle may be withdrawn, should be withdrawn. It has served its purpose, brought the man face to face with the spiritual world which he had been ignoring, and has compelled him to regard it. But now he must advance into living touch with the spiritual, let go the crutches that have helped him to it, and stand upright on his feet. He must ask no more miracle to support his faith, but

draw directly upon the springs of life in Christ.

We have thus arrived at a point from which we see clearly that though miracles do not now happen as they are said to have happened in Christ's day, that is no reason for presuming that they did not happen then. We see that so far from its being unlikely that they should have happened then, the unlikelihood is all the other way. And so we discover that what was made an *à priori* ground of objection to the credibility of the Gospels is in reality a feature that commends them to our attention and credence. Miracles we see have still their evidential value. And there is still force in Christ's own appeal to them, 'Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me'; *i.e.* believe me from the pure sensitiveness of your hearts to the inmost truth of spiritual life, 'or else believe Me,'—a concession to blindness and incapacity —'or else believe Me for the very works' sake.'

I have said that the day of miracles is past. They have served their purpose, and it is lack of faith that re-demands them. It savours of unbelief and materialism when men pretend,

and encourage others to believe, that miraculous powers are still in operation for the cure of disease. It is superstition to believe that. It is either imposture or fatal misconception of the nature of Christianity to teach that. The day for that is past, years and centuries ago. If you ask me what right I have to say so, it is because its work is done. It is not needed. But while the day of miracle in the physical world is over, that does not mean that God is not at work in all His world making all things work together for good to them that love Him. That does not mean that gracious coincidences which may occur, fraught with blessing, are not manifestations of His love and care, or are not to be sought for in prayer and acknowledged with thanksgiving. That does not mean that there are no miracles in the spiritual realm. There is not a soul saved, but that is a miracle, a great intervention of God to suspend the law of the tyranny of habit, break through the law of sin and its wages. And these are the greatest miracles of all, 'with man impossible, but not with God.' And you can see them to this day in sinners converted and souls saved. Nay, any man's hope for

eternity depends on this, that he can point to a miracle in his own life's experience, wherein he has come through no less than a resurrection, life from the dead through faith in Jesus Christ. Has that miracle happened? Has it happened to you, reader? If not, do not be content till in that experience you have the best answer to our question, Did miracles happen? Then you may answer, 'Yes, they did. They do. I 'm one, for Jesus has saved me.'

# WHY IS SIN PERMITTED?

'Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.'

JAMES.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WHY IS SIN PERMITTED?

THE question we are now to consider is, Why is sin permitted? And there is a text in James which, with the passage in which it occurs, shows that this is an old perplexity on which men have been exercised for ages. You need not expect, therefore, that when I have finished all mystery and all perplexity about it will have disappeared. All I can hope to do is to suggest some considerations that we are apt to overlook in connection with the subject, and which exclude the possibility of some of our tacit assumptions in proposing it.

This perplexity, the permission of sin, is the root-problem in the whole problem of evil. Hear the cry in protest against evil at its loudest, and this is where the wildest words are said, for here not God's power or know-

ledge but His character is impeached. Hear Hood's 'Song of the Shirt,' or Mrs. Browning's 'Cry of the Children,' and the reproach is against man's inhumanity to man. But the pessimist looks, as he thinks, deeper, sees farther, and these iniquities are but symptoms of a ruthlessness and recklessness which he says are prevalent through all Nature, and which declare its Creator a monster of injustice; as witness the sarcasm of a Schopenhauer or a Hartmann, or the blasphemy of Fitzgerald's 'Omar Khayyam.' They say sin's permission is no perplexity. It is only what was to be expected in a world governed by a God whose whole handiwork,—'Nature, red in tooth and claw from rapine,'—betrays the fact that He has no regard for distinctions of right and wrong, is not 'Wisdom, Love, Might,' but Weakness, Cunning, Spite. No need to ask, Why is sin permitted? It is well to hear the problem in its baldest form like this, and then we see all that is involved, and what answers it is within the limits of possibility to accept. That answer of the pessimist has only to be stated to be seen to be impossible. As an exaggerated burlesque of the problem, sug-

gestive in a grotesque way of its gravity, it may be listened to. As a serious contribution to its solution, it is an impertinence.

1. Now as the first point on the way to a solution, it is well to remember that while there is a problem of evil, a problem of sin, 'there is not, and there never has been, a problem of the good.' I well remember reading a reminder of that sort in Professor James's book, *The Will to Believe*, and it was like a vision of truth to me. It is just so true that I had never thought of it. There is no problem of the good. We are not surprised, nobody ever is, or ever has been, surprised at all the evidences of goodness there are in the world. We sometimes sing about them in hymns:

> 'When all Thy mercies, O my God, my rising soul surveys,
> Transported with the view, I'm lost in wonder, love, and praise.'

So we sing with Joseph Addison; and then some sneering cynic comes along and jeers at this, and mocks at that, and manufactures a grievance here and an injustice there, and this doubt troubles us and that, and wonder,

love and praise are ashamed at their own simplicity and sing dumb. But why? Isn't this a fact well worth pondering when sin and evil perplex us, why are we never perplexed by the manifold good which we do see, which not even the most jaundiced eye can disregard? What are we to make of it that the good is what we expect, is what we regard as the natural thing in this world? To my mind it is a great, unsolicited, instinctive witness to the inner conviction of the soul of men that God who made the world is good. It is the unnatural, the unexpected, that raises questions, problems, perplexities. It is evil and sin that do that. And the very fact that they do, and that goodness does not, is evidence that the normal in God's universe is the good. That is what we naturally expect. And our natural expectation testifies at once to what we have unconsciously recognised as creation's prevailing character, and to what is consequently His true character, the Holy, Just, and Good. That then is a point we must never allow to become obscure. Sin, evil, by the very fact that it raises a problem, testifies to its own

abnormality. The natural thing in God's world is the Good. Why the one, and why the other? From the one constant conviction, that whatever be the solution of the problem, one thing is certain; God is good. Were that not so, evil and sin would present no problem; the problem then would be the Good.

2. But there is a sidelight also on this problem of sin, that is, the problem of evil in the region of morals, from the resolution of the problem in other spheres.

We get help here from the hypothesis of evolution. The recognition that this world of ours, and the scheme of things throughout it, is not so much a finished structure as a great plan still in progress towards completion, leads to this result: we find a place for imperfections and are not staggered by their presence. They are simply experiments in an upward movement, secured by the selection and survival of the fittest.

For instance, take such sources of widespread disaster as earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. What are these? Geologists tell us they are simply necessary concomitants of the cooling of the earth's crust. But the

earth has only become habitable by the cooling of its crust. And should great stretches of it, already fit for human life, have been still left untenanted for ages, because some few such incidents in a few places might still occur with disastrous results to some few men? No sane man would say so. For even if some men perish by them, life here in any case for immortals is not the supreme concern, and

> 'Come he slow or come he fast,
> Strike one by one, or in the mass,
> It is but death that comes at last.'

These natural catastrophes are no reflection on the Divine Author and Owner of our lives. Or again, take the struggle for existence as you find it among animals. I would remark that care is needed to differentiate between the elements at work in what is called the struggle for existence among them, and the supposed analogous struggle among men. There are moral elements in the latter that are quite absent in the former. Forgetting this, thinking of the selfishness and tyranny that often characterise the human struggle, we import the same ideas into the animal world,

which are not really there. Doubtless there is a law of prey there. But I am only expressing the thoughts of some of the tenderest-hearted scholars in the domain of natural history when I say that they regard all those elements, which make the struggle so tragic on the human plane, as largely absent among the lower animals. Life there to them seems fraught with gladness. There is no thought that brings gloomy foreboding and spreads despair or dread through a lifetime for man. And the disappearance of a race left behind in the struggle is not suggestive of a plague-smitten city, a famine-struck land, or the slaughter of a battle-field, it is rather like the disappearance of an old family which gradually becomes extinct for want of heirs—a pathetic enough event, but more so to spectators and to their imaginations than to the last survivors themselves.

Or once more, when all is said of the terrible havoc of pain and suffering in human lives, are their effects only evil? Are they not the spur and incentive to many a noble effort? Are not the very hardships

through which many men have passed to fame, distinction, and worthiest service of their kind, the influences which have made them the men they have become? Are they not the refining fires through which spirits have passed to their glory? Nay, is not the human mind so constituted that among its finest souls nothing seems more attractive than a task that will test a man's powers, show what he can do, give him the opportunity to display the best that is in him? Why is it that men on holiday often prefer arduous exercise and exciting adventure to the most seductive allurements of ease and safety? It is the same spirit at work. It is not the life free from toil, pain, effort, that is best, but that in which there lurks a spur to higher things. Now if all that is so, it may appear that sin itself, or, at any rate, temptation to it, may be turned to account. It may have a purpose to serve. And even if not part of the original plan, yet if when once it has entered we can see it utilised —and we can—to give men stepping-stones to higher things, even though much may yet remain dark and mysterious, and our question is not yet answered, Why is sin permitted? some

of the perplexity is relieved, and things are not so dark as they seemed.

3. And yet Robert Louis Stevenson's quaint verse still lingers:

> 'Oh I wad like to ken, to the beggar wife, said I,
> The reason of the cause, and the wherefore of the why,
> Wi' mony anither riddle brings the tear into my ee.
> It's gey an' easy speiring, says the beggar wife to me.'

'The reason of the cause and the wherefore of the why.' That is the rub. We have seen mitigating considerations that relieve the perplexity. But why is there sin in the world at all? Why has an Almighty, All-Holy God suffered its entrance? The question put thus assumes two things: first, that a perfectly holy God cannot tolerate sin in His world; and second, that if His might is equal to His holiness, He can effectually prevent its entrance. Now neither of these assumptions is correct. If a perfectly holy God resolves to create man, no matter though He be omnipotent, He takes the risk—and He knows it—of sin entering into His world. Please try to understand that. In creating man, God deliberately ran the risk of the entrance of sin,

and He could not escape it. Given man—if man was to be—with the very gifts that make him man, that distinguish him from, and set him above, all the other creatures, sin is immediately a possibility. For what is it that distinguishes man from brute and stone? Is it not above all else his moral nature, his capacity to know God and God's will, and his power to choose it or refuse it? His freedom, his moral responsibility, his God-granted right of choice and will,—these make him man, make him, among things created, capable of fellowship with God. But these powers cannot be possessed without the possibility of the abuse of them. If he is truly free, he may turn away from God instead of to Him. If he is really responsible, the author of his own conduct and answerable for it, he may use it wrongly instead of aright, incur guilt instead of win approval. In place of God's will and God's service he may choose his own will and live to please himself. That is all involved in the nature God has given to man, and even omnipotence cannot do the impossible, both grant the gift and withhold it.

Well, but you say, if this be so, why did

God, the good, the holy God, run such a risk? Why did He not say, better not make man at all than create such a dangerous explosive, the erratic dynamite of the world of life? Now do you seriously mean that, or are you asking for the sake of argument? If only for the latter, the question is not worth answering; if for the former, have you thought of what the question means? Which were the nobler, a world peopled with holy men and women, all intelligently and delightedly serving God, or a world perfect in all else, but with not an intelligent soul upon it to admire its beauty or adore its Maker? Ay, even as things are upon the earth, and assuming that the other planets have no rational or moral beings upon them, which is the more glorious spectacle, Jupiter with his stately moons, lone Saturn with his fiery rings, or Earth with its busy cities of men, marred indeed by sin, but full, too, of faith and love and worship. I for one do not hesitate to give the palm to Earth. No doubt Earth without a failure, Earth without a sin, Earth where temptation had always failed were better still; but such Earth could not be, without the risk

of sin. And it is in view of the glorious possibility that men would not sin, would resist the temptations, and give to God the greatest joy and honour that one heart can give to another, free, loyal, perfect service and obedience, that God took the risk and created man.

Looking to the way man has succumbed, however, was there not selfishness in this? you say. Was it not too great a risk? Take another parallel to help an answer. We know the risks that beset the lives of children. We know how disease attacks them, how life involves struggle and toil. True, they make home bright; they may not succumb to the evils; there are paths though arduous that lead to honour and renown, that bring good to men and glory to God, and these they may be trained to pursue. They will have days on days packed with all the joy and gladness of young innocent life. But still, better have no children; happier, more noble the home where there are none, rather than run any risks. Who says Amen? No one. Why charge God with selfishness, then, if even with all its risks He gave life to men?

Nay, but you say, why did He not so safeguard man that the risks which tempta-

tions bring should never have reached him, or only when he should have become so strong in mind, so stout of heart, and so firm of will, that defeat by them should have been almost an impossibility? Again in reply I work by analogy. Which do you reckon the wiser father? The man who, knowing the evil there is in the world and fearing the havoc it may play with his child, keeps him innocent by keeping him ignorant, keeps him from falling by never allowing him to learn to walk, keeps him from sowing his wild oats by never letting him into the field of the world to have the chance even of sowing good seed; or the man who equally knows the risks but says, my child must face it, learn to resist the temptation, grow strong through trial and conflict, and bids him face the world, teaching him the while the source and secret of strength and victory. Your answer I am sure of. You will say with Milton: 'He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised

and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.' So with God. He is a wise Father. He sent man into the world at the first, perfect, not immutable, fortified at every point, liable to temptation indeed, but forewarned and forearmed. And if, after all, sin found its way into man's heart, then the humiliating question,—Why is sin permitted?—is not to be addressed to God, but to man. We should ask not why does God permit sin, but why does man commit sin? With a glorious prize within his reach, the prize of a freely directed choice, choosing the good, refusing the evil, with the opportunity of laying the crown at the feet of God, and receiving it again at His hands, adorned with new lustre, the shame is to see him place it on his own head, take the evil and refuse the good. Why does it happen? Do not ask God. Ask man. Why, why, a thousand times, O fool, why?

We see then that to ask this question,—Why is sin permitted?—as a reproach against God's holiness and might is ultimately to repudiate our manhood and belittle the very gifts

in which our dignity as men resides, to rebel against the very conditions upon which alone the highest plane of created intelligences can be reached.

4. But we can never feel that we have done full justice to the mind of God on the question of sin until we have been to Calvary. At the Cross we see this about sin, that there are limits to God's permission of it. He has allowed man to run the risk of it. He has allowed him in his self-will to fall under the spell of it, would introduce no external compulsion to serve as a mock preventive, checking the outward expression while the inward thought was in arms against Him. But He would not allow sin to run on without meeting its condign punishment. He would not allow sin to hold the field in undisputed sway. He would not allow sin to remain in final possession of His most precious handiwork. Cost Him what it might, He would vanquish and expel it by the only means which can secure victory in such a field, by the weapons that touch the deepest springs of man's being, the weapons of sacrifice and service wielded by pity and love.

Now that is what you see at the Cross of Christ. Remember who this is that suffers here. It is Jesus of Nazareth, our brother man. Yes, but it is also Jesus the Christ, the Incarnate Son of the Living God. And what do you see when He is done to death? Sin permitted? You may call it so, if you will. But I call it sin left free to expose itself in its true character, permitted as a man with a mailed fist might permit a viper to writhe and twist and hiss and bite in his grasp, ere he crushed it to death in all its ugliness beneath his heel. No, I do not see sin permitted. I see sin condemned. I see sin forbidden. I see sin met by its Master whom all its allurements could not tempt, whom all its terrors could not cause to swerve or hesitate, whom all its malice could not embitter. I see sin baffled, its erstwhile fascinated captives awakened to its true character, and to the utmost loathing of its vile presence. I see sin doing its worst, aiming its deadliest blows, and they are powerless and nerveless against the might of Divine Love. The Holiness of God is vindicated in the face of sin. The Might of God is manifested as able to more than cope with sin,

and that, too, meeting it on its own plane, in the world of the moral and the spiritual, checking it, expelling it, not by mere force and compulsion, not by countermanding or overriding the freedom bestowed on man, but by bringing into play against it influences in the life of man, even after he had been mad enough to permit sin to invade his heart and lead it captive, influences strong enough to break its power, rescue its captives, and win them back to the holy love, unhesitating faith, and freely rendered service which God had always desired. And so in conclusion I say, we should never let the question of the presence of sin beset us without betaking ourselves afresh to Calvary to see once more what God really thinks of sin. And our own hearts will endorse the evidence which that great sight affords, that not God's permission but the fatal madness of our own proud hearts is responsible at any rate for *our* sin. And if that be so for ours, then why not the same in the case of all other men? Not by God's weakness or connivance, but by man's bad compliance, sin has obtained its unhallowed place in the world of man.

# IS PRAYER ANSWERED?

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you.'

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE SON OF GOD.

## CHAPTER IX

### IS PRAYER ANSWERED?

As I was walking along the Calton Hill in Edinburgh, one bright spring day, I was thinking of this subject. There was a clear blue sky with here and there a fleecy cloud. A fresh crisp wind was blowing from the east, carrying the smoke away from the hill, and Arthur's Seat in vivid green and brown stood out in bold relief. In sharp outline stood the ruins of the Abbey of Holyrood in the valley below, and against the sky the gable and empty windows of St. Anthony's Chapel on its crag. And the city westward with guarded Palace, busy breweries and gasworks, and smoke from a thousand dwellings, seemed to have turned its back on its sanctuaries and the hills, 'from whence shall come mine aid,' left to solitude and in ruins the places where holy men were wont to pray. And it all was weird and seemed an allegory.

It seemed to bid men ask, what does a grimy, smoky, modern city, content with creature comforts, careful to guard a deserted Palace, while it lets a shrine go to ruins—what does it care about prayer at all? Has it not left it behind as a relic of a superstitious past? Is it worth while discussing difficulties about prayer with dwellers in places like this?

But I rallied myself. I reminded myself that if these shrines were in ruins, in the city were hundreds of churches where men still meet to worship. My nightmare and allegory was a passing dream, though worth thinking about as a warning in a materialistic age. Still in the cities thousands meet to pray, and they are interested in the question, Is prayer answered? They have heard it questioned. Does—nay, can—God answer prayer? And they have heard objections urged against the possibility of it. And they have felt that, if the answer must be 'No,' then religion is vain; prayer, the right and privilege of prayer, alone gave it worth. Now there is a sense in which that is profoundly true. And the devoutest souls would stake their all on the privilege of prayer, would say 'prayer gone, then all is gone.'

But there is another class whose spiritual interests are of the flimsiest, to whom prayer is of things the rarest, and yet what little of religion still lurks in them is just this. They believe that if in dire extremity, when everything else has failed, they betake themselves with sufficient urgency to prayer, it can be, and it will be answered, and they will escape from their difficulties. What they are thinking of chiefly is prayer's efficacy in meeting physical straits and temporal needs, the sailor in the storm, say, the man reduced to poverty, or the man on a sick-bed crying, not for pardon, but for recovery. And that earnest prayer from a believing soul in such cases is often answered signally, arrestingly, I joyfully believe. But as regards the class I have spoken about, who treat prayer as a sort of last resort and talisman, whose whole interest in it is about whether it will certainly be answered just as they want it or not, I am not concerned to relieve their perplexity. For what they need is to learn what true prayer is. If denial after denial is all that comes to men with such worldly-minded views and with conceptions of prayer so earthly and so selfish,

and in consequence they are led to be done with that unspiritual thought of it, and give it up on these lines for ever, then there could be nothing better for them than to find that God does not answer that kind of prayer, or that if He does, it is in judgment, as when to an Israel that could only pray for earthly gear and worldly prosperity, He granted them their request, but sent leanness into their souls.

No, we need to examine our motives for being interested in this question. Why do we want to know whether prayer is answered or not? Would it materially affect our opinion if the result we arrived at was that prayer about spiritual affairs, about salvation, conversion, growth in grace, was invariably answered, but that prayer about mere earthly concerns was left unnoticed? Would the result be that all interest in, or practice of, prayer would increase, or would cease? We need to examine our motives.

Leaving these points, however, which I hope have suggested that prayer is something else than a mere begging of God for specific earthly benefits, that pleading the promises of God is something else than presenting cheques

—God's promises to pay—at the bank of heaven, which we can take out at our will in that form of the current coin of earth which we prefer, let us look at this problem, Is prayer answered? It might seem as if here we had simply to do with a question of fact, and that an appeal to fact would be sufficient. And if that were so, the Bible, for instance, is simply a storehouse of facts to prove that prayer is answered. Or if we take the whole history of the Christian church, or the experience of the most observant Christian men, on all hands we will be amply furnished with facts to show that God does answer prayer not only indirectly but directly, so much so indeed that the conviction left on the minds of those who pray is that

> 'There is no secret sigh we breathe
> But meets the ear Divine.'

But those who raise perplexities in men's minds on this subject do not question the facts. They question the interpretation of them. They dispute the connection between the prayer and the event that is called the answer to it. Their reason for doing so is very like their objection to the idea of the

possibility of miracles. The objection runs along three lines. They first of all terrorise us with immutable laws of nature. Then they overwhelm us with a sense of our own insignificance, as if God (if there be a God) could possibly modify the great affairs of the universe at the request and for the benefit of a puny human unit. And then they ridicule what they call the impertinence of any finite intellect presuming to advise the All-wise God by its prayer as to the proper way to conduct the affairs of His universe. And in the light of all this they say that what seem to be answers to prayer are merely accidents, coincidences, pious self-deceptions, the fruit of fevered imaginations.

By way of reply I need not repeat what I said in Chapter VII. as to the possibility and even the probability of such interventions by God as we call miracle, which are simply answers to prayer raised to the highest degree of vividness, and involving the most unusual intervention with the ordinary current of events in order to effect them. Neither will I try to evade the force of the appeal to laws of nature by reminding you that there are laws of the

spiritual realm as well as of the physical world; that there are crossings and recrossings among them, and an inter-relation of play between them; and that in the great pre-established harmony of God's universe, for which laws of nature is but another name, the prayers to whose efficacy men point may have been predetermined as conditions essential to the results which actually followed, and without which these could not have taken place. That but seems to me a mechanical conception of the world, leaving it to go as a vast machine in the midst of which man's sense of free will and responsibility is reduced to a fiction of his own brain, with no truth or reality in it. More than that, to regard the world as a vast machine, going on automatically while God, its Maker, is engaged elsewhere, is a conception so crude that I cannot believe it true.

I find my answer in a different direction. For one thing, every one of the objections is *à priori*. That is to say, they are not based on fact, but on theory. And what is worse, and what is more, they are based on a theory which runs counter to the evidence and to the experience, and to the testimony of those best

entitled to speak on the subject. They are based on a theory of God and His character and His relation to His universe and the men He has placed in it, which has its nearest analogy in some wealthy capitalist whose money is in a great concern, who has laid down the lines on which it is to be run, and who cares not one straw for one of his employees, so long as he gets his profits out of the business. That is one of the most contemptible and most hateful creatures in this world; and do you mean to tell me that God, my God, my heavenly Father, is the least like that? Are you going to ask me to believe such blasphemous nonsense? If so, you must take me for a fool; or else you are utterly ignorant as to what is God's true character, and what is His true relation to man. There are those who know. There are experts in this subject. Peerless among them all is the only begotten Son who was in the bosom of the Father. He hath revealed God. And if you do not believe with me that Jesus was the very Son of God, ask anybody who is entitled to speak on the subject of religion, and he will tell you that Jesus of Nazareth was the

most original spiritual genius that this world has ever seen, that the discoveries He has made in the world of spirit are as astounding and as well-attested by their results among the world of men as are the most brilliant discoveries in the world of nature of a Kepler, a Galileo, or a Newton, or in the world of science of a Darwin, a Kelvin, or an Edison. On the lowest footing, this is a subject on which Jesus is entitled to speak with supreme authority. And after all others have raised their difficulties, offered their solutions, confessed themselves baffled, the final word rests with Him. As God says, 'This is My beloved Son; hear Him.'

Now what does Jesus say on this subject? He reveals this great eternal truth about God. He says: He is a Father; He is the Father. From Him all fatherhood in heaven and earth gets its name. And fatherhood at its best, as we know it, is but a faint adumbration of what it means in its perfection in God of love and solicitude, will and power to help the children who are His own. And that is what men and women are, not mere intricate inventions, mechanical toys playing their little part in this

great machine, the world, but God's children with points of affinity in their nature with His own, and capable of fellowship with Him. And so to understand the relations of God to man and man to God, you have not to go to the models in the pattern shop, or to the factory with its operatives, or to the courthouse with its laws, or even to the palace with its rooms of state and subjects in obeisance before their monarch. But go to the home, go to the nursery, see a father with his children, ay, better still, a mother with her prattling little ones with a thousand requests a day, and learn there what God is. There perplexity about the answer of prayer will vanish. You will find Christ standing there saying, 'If a son ask bread, will his father give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?'

It is in the light of this that you get Ruskin's thoroughgoing reply to all this black wall of cloud that is raised to keep us back from the throne of grace, this phantom raised by

juggling with the laws of nature, which no delighted child of God does anything but admire until some officious busybody distorts them into a barrier to keep him out of his Father's private room, then he discriminates; he won't stand that. What does Ruskin say? He says, 'Speaking as a Christian, . . . I tell my scholars, with all the force that is in me, that the facts of the universe are not steadfast, that they are changed by human fancies and by human follies (how much more by human wisdoms)—that the laws of the universe are no more relentless than the God who wrote them,—that they will relax in the presence of human weakness, and do give way under the pressure of human passion and force, and give way so totally, before so little passion and force, that if you have but faith as a grain of mustard seed, nothing shall be impossible unto you.' Indeed he sums it up in this way: if he has to choose between human effort and God's help, he says, 'I will go pray.'

And so we come back to our facts, feel that we have a right to appeal to them, and take heart from them. And here are two that have come directly under my notice recently, one in

the sphere of things temporal, the other in the world of the spirits of men. The one is the story of one of our young public singers. He had a splendid voice. His friends advised him to go to London, consult the leading musical authorities, and, if so encouraged, get trained. He did so. And the man he saw told him his voice was splendid, he only wanted one thing, but as he hadn't it (he arrived in London, from California, with but five pounds in his pockets), it was impossible—he had no money. At his wits' end, he was living in a garret literally on bread and water, when he got a letter asking him to call on a particular gentleman, a total stranger, which he did, when the man told him that the musician he had consulted had mentioned his case to him, and as he had means, he told him to send for his wife and he would see him through his studies. This he did, and the young man can now afford to refuse five hundred pounds a-year for his singing. But do you know how he accounts for his way being opened? He says 'my wife was praying for it; and I was praying for it.' He is a Christian man. 'Oh!' you say, 'that proves nothing. It might all have happened

though he had never prayed.' So it might. But you might just as well say it might all have happened without his going to London, or without the musician happening to meet the generous man, or remembering the interesting case. Your objection is quite plausible, but is worth nothing. The point is, he prayed; his wife prayed; and, contrary to all ordinary probability, his way was fully opened up. That is a case in one sphere.

In the *Missionary Record* of the United Free Church for May 1902 there is something quite as striking. It gives the account of a recent revival in Livingstonia, so welcome, so gladdening to the teachers, the missionaries, and all friends of missions. At first there was general hollowness and apathy on spiritual matters; then a movement began, grew, and spread. Lads at school were first awakened to concern; then they were brought to the Saviour; and then they brought others; then they formed praying bands to pray for others; then they took courage to speak themselves. And where did all this come from? Partly from the prayers that many are constantly offering for Livingstonia, often very

indefinite but animated by much love; but very directly, in answer to the definite prayers of two young ladies, teachers in that school. Does it seem a simpler thing that answers should come here than where the laws of the physical universe are involved? Believe me there are laws of character, laws of habit, laws of association, laws of the moral and spiritual life, that are as hard to check by any human force as is the law of gravitation. There are laws of retribution, the effects that come from indifference and frivolity and excess, as inexorable as the procession of the seasons. With these laws of character prayer's answer is not easier, but more difficult. But prayer is answered here as there. The facts proclaim it.

And so there need be no doubt as to the answer to our perplexity. Prayer is answered. God does answer prayer. But that our prayers may be answered we must make sure of two things; first, that we have the right; and second, that we observe the conditions. (*a*) To have prayers answered, we must have the right. Prayer is the right of the child of God. And it is the child in living harmony with its Father that has the right to pray. 'Ah,' you

say, 'but there are no step-bairns in God's family. We all can say "Our Father."' So we can, if we will. But if in place of that we shut the door on ourselves, it is a different story. I will not say that if, in our extremity, we even then cry to God, He will not hear us. Indeed I feel sure He will; He is so good. And perhaps His goodness will touch our hard hearts and bring us home. But I do not admit the right. It is something of an insult to God for a man to talk of himself as God's child, and ignore God's wishes and resist His laws. It is only the true child that has the right to pray. (*b*) But what is more, we must observe the conditions. And only gradually, and only completely in Christ Himself, has the supreme condition come into clearness. It is this, that in all things we qualify our requests with the proviso of our own ignorance and God's perfect wisdom and goodwill, 'not my will, but Thine be done.' Ultimately that is the perfect prayer, ever sure of an answer: 'Thy will be done,'—not a sob of sad resignation, but a joyous outburst of confidence, sure that this is best. It took humanity thousands of years to learn that. They do not

know it very well yet. As Sabatier says:—'Prayer is the very soul of religion . . . nothing better reveals the worth and moral dignity of a religion than the kind of prayer it puts into the lips of its adherents. . . . The savage beats his fetish when it is not complacent enough. The Christian in his greatest distresses repeats the prayer of Jesus in the Garden: "Father, not my will, but Thine be done!" What a long road man has travelled between these two extreme points of religion.' And so I say we must have the right, and fulfil the conditions, before we can be sure that our prayers will be answered.

But a curious feeling creeps over me at this stage. It seems that now, when I feel sure that God is the hearer and the answerer of prayer, feel sure that prayer is answered, I am not so anxious about my particular requests being granted. The thing that I am concerned about is that God hears me. If He does, I am content that the form in which the answer comes should be entirely in His hands. What I ask, what I am most urgent about, may be far from the best for me. But He knows absolutely, and I can trust His wisdom as well as His goodness. And as a result I have got

to a new, which is the true, conception of prayer. It is not a mere matter of asking and receiving. Answers to prayer in the shape of definite and particular results just as I asked them, even when they are right, are not my supreme concern in prayer. Prayer is the glad, free fellowship of my heart with God, with my heavenly Father, through the Son, my Saviour. In it I am in the Spirit, and the Spirit is in me whereby I cry 'Abba, Father.' And prayer is essentially the child's opening of its heart to its Father. It may be the unburdening of griefs. It may be the confession of faith. It may be the confiding of hopes and aspirations, purposes and intentions. It may be protestations of affection. It may be the presentation of requests. But that is not the only thing nor the chief thing, any more than it is in the talk of a boy or a girl with an earthly parent. Does God answer prayer? Yes, when it needs an answer. But, better still, He always hears it, whatever its subject be.

One further word about this. Perhaps I have convinced you that God does answer prayer. Perhaps you have always believed it, and have been in the habit of prayer. But if

you mean to retain your faith in it, you must look out for answers. That is where perplexity often begins. Men pray, and never take the trouble to see if the prayer is granted. In these circumstances quite likely it is not. If God sees they don't care, is it likely that He will trouble Himself about such heedless requests. At last something begets a terrible earnestness. They pray; they must pray; but they have no confidence that God will hear. Assurances are well enough, should be enough, but they have no testimony of experience of their own to back them up, and a haunting fear creeps over them that the prayer may all go for nothing, be poured into deaf ears, or into ears that hear but there is no heart behind that is willing, or hand that is able, to help. It is a trying experience, but they have themselves to blame for it. So I say, test the theory of the answer by experiment, made in all devoutness. Pray. Pray in the spirit of Christ. Ask for things you know to be agreeable to God's will. And look out for the answers. They will come in God's own time and way, and you will have no further perplexity on this score. Prayer, you will know by experience, is answered.

# IS THERE A HEREAFTER?

'I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that . . . believeth in Me shall never die.'—JESUS CHRIST.

## CHAPTER X

### IS THERE A HEREAFTER?

Is there a Hereafter? The consensus of humanity says Yes. And revelation endorses that answer. Could we convene a meeting of all humanity and take a show of hands, we should find that men of every nation and of every age would give their vote for the conviction that there is a future state, a life after death. And what would perhaps carry more weight than the mere numbers is that we should find the greatest minds of all the ages and races on the same side. The great founders of religion are there, Zoroaster, and Buddha, and Mahomet. The poets are there, Homer and Virgil, Dante and Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Tennyson and Browning. The sages are there, Socrates and Plato, Cato and Cicero, Carlyle and Emerson and Martineau. And alongside of all these master-minds we place

the whole stream of revelation, from the days when God gave it at sundry times and in diverse methods until He spake at last in His Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour, and the consensus is complete, all say Yes: there is a Hereafter. The life of man is not confined to the few short years between birth and death.

1. Now in the face of such a strong body of thought all pointing the one way, how is it that there is any perplexity here? Why should men be in any doubt, at least on this point, that death does not end all? I can see three reasons, yea four, and the fourth a great forgetfulness, in the cure of which is the final disposer of all the rest. (*a*) Here is one reason. A man you know dies. You gaze on his dead body. It is laid away in the grave. And from the moment when the breath goes out of his body he gives not another sign of connection with the affairs of this earth. And yet men say he still lives. Why? (*b*) Here is another reason. Men who believe in immortality and in the resurrection have allowed themselves to sink to lamentably crude conceptions of the mode of life in the beyond. They have committed themselves to the most

grossly materialistic conceptions of what both heaven and hell will be. They have spoken of the resurrection as if it involved a recall of all the particles that formed the body laid in the grave, to provide in an etherealised form the new risen body. And these crude imaginings have readily lent themselves to the play of ridicule and travesty. And under this men have been led to wonder if the whole thing were not a vain imagination, and painful though the result might be, prefer to abandon entirely a belief that seemed to involve so many incongruities and absurdities. That accounts for perplexity. (*c*) Still further, the trend of science in some directions seemed to say No. There might be persistence of the race. But of the individual science could give no assurance, offer no solid evidence that death did not seal his fate and the grave simply consummate his dissolution. (*d*) And then here is the fourth, the great forgetfulness. Men will speak of the Hereafter as 'the undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns,' as if none ever had; while, in reality, to say nothing of those recalled by word of prophet or apostle, or even by the

Master himself, Jesus has come back, come back in human form, and has never again come under death's spell, but lives, lives now, says of Himself, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life; I am He that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.' And for any man who professes to believe in Jesus to allow himself for a moment to be perplexed or in doubt as to the fact of the Hereafter, be the details of it what you will, is simply to become the victim of his own forgetfulness of what lies at the very root of his faith. As for the man who does not profess to believe in Jesus, he cannot claim to be scientific, if he neglects this fact. Its solitariness in no way invalidates it. It is the relevant factor which must be reckoned with in the discussion of the subject.

2. Now, so far as I can judge, science even in the hands of its most negative exponents does not pretend that it has found any new difficulties in connection with the universal belief in a Hereafter. It has simply emphasised the points which all along have been the disturbing elements and which are obvious to the most uneducated—death, disappearance, and decay. Where it has become a new danger is

in the brilliancy of its reply, when the loss, which the denial of immortality would bring to morality, was invoked against this denial. It was said that fear of hell and hope of heaven were the powerful influences to deter men from evil and impel them to good. But the reply is that morality can stand on its own legs, and that right is right and wrong is wrong whether there be heaven and hell or no. And writers such as the late Professor Clifford and Professor Gizycke have argued this with great ability. I do not know that they have with the same success dealt with the sense of responsibility, which is more than fear of hell or hope of heaven. But while their dialectic is brilliant, there are facts that should make us pause. It is a fact, and a solemn fact, that a materialistic view of the world has its complement in an epicurean morality, which is only another name for reasoned immorality. It is dainty and æsthetic among the cultured classes, but its counterpart among the masses is gross enough. In literature it expresses itself thus:

'I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of the After-Life to spell:
And by and by my Soul returned to me,
And answered, "I myself am Heaven and Hell."

Heaven but the Vision of fulfilled Desire,
And Hell the Shadow from a Soul on Fire
Cast on the Darkness into which ourselves,
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.'

This is disbelief in a future life exquisitely expressed. But what is the advice for life given in the poem from which these words are quoted, and based on this experiment? Seize the wine-cup, and drink deep: 'let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' That is not old-world paganism. That is the philosophy, if not the practice, of the present day fashionable Omar Khayyam cult. In brutal plainness we may state it thus, 'Death ends all, so let us die drunk.' Thus there is more in the influence of the Future on morality, more serious consequences in the denial and the loss of it, than a brilliant dialectic will admit. And fact tells where logic fails.

Besides, explain it how you will, there is the instinct that says 'spite of all appearances, our lives survive death.' Nothing is lamer than naturalistic attempts to explain it away. Mr. Herbert Spencer, for instance, tells us that the explanation is to be found in the habit of the primitive mind. After the death of his chief

or his father or mother, the savage, we are told, dreams of them still. And his mind, at such an early stage, does not sharply distinguish between dream and reality, naturally assumes that what he dreams of must have some substantial reality still to correspond to it. And so his chief, his parents, though gone from earth, must still exist to have visited him in his dreams. But why? Surely it is asking too much to tell us that only at the hands of culture does the human mind learn to distinguish between the real and the figments of a dream. A child instinctively distinguishes. You cannot explain the hope of a life hereafter by a theory about the effect of dreams. And 'There's aye a pulse within the heart beats hame, hame, hame'; and 'Heaven is my home.'

Just as unsuccessful is the attempt to satisfy that instinct by telling it that what it really testifies to is, not a future for each of an individual personal existence, but a dwelling in the grateful memory of those who have profited by his endeavours, a living in them to share in the triumphs of every advance of the race here upon the earth. Is there a Hereafter?

We think we can at least with absolute confidence say there will be a to-morrow. And one of the most fatiguingly fascinating of recent books, Mr. Benjamin Kidd's *Principles of Western Civilisation*, is written to prove that the peoples which have the ball of fortune at their feet in our day are those which have shown the most marked capacity to live as nations not for the day but for the morrow, not for the here but for the hereafter, not for the present but for the future, a future which will be a Kingdom of God, a reign of universal peace and brotherhood on this earth. And doubtless it is something well worth living for, striving for, dying for, to bring about such a grand result. Doubtless it is something to spur one's worthiest ambition, to know that by doing well for those of the coming day, we shall live on their tongues in grateful memory. How inspiring is it! As George Eliot's verses aptly put it:—

'O may I join the Choir Invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence, live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end in self,

In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge men's search
To vaster issues. . . . This is life to come
Which martyred men have made more glorious
For us to follow.'

Very beautiful! An inspiration! Yes, but what hope of a share in such immortality is there for the most of us? If that is all, what a satire on it is the hope of the millions of forgotten dead! Such immortality is, must be, the perquisite of but a privileged, talented few. It contains no promise to the vast throng of commonplace men and women, is no explanation of what is their instinctive hope, is a mere shadow of it.

When you try to analyse this hope of a Hereafter, this belief which is co-extensive with the faith in God, if you look at it in the situations where it asserts itself, it is impossible to find any merely naturalistic explanation of it. You stand by the side of the dead, your dearest. You are heartbroken. Part of your life seems to have gone out with them. But you are face to face with the inevitable, and you are soothed to submission by the thought that your loved one lives

still, is not lost but gone before, and you will meet again. But years pass. The wound heals. Are you as keen to-day about that re-union as you were at the first? Honestly, no. It is a diminishing quantity, and a merely natural wish for the continuance of the company of one you have loved well, will not explain all. Or you face death yourself. Is the thought that with it your existence perhaps may end for ever impossible? Must not the opposite be but a fond imagination, the fruit of an undue estimate of your own importance? I can fancy what your answers may be, and that facing it deliberately you could find arguments with which to argue yourself out of the belief. And yet it persists. Irrespective of revelation, not as a perquisite of a few leaders of the race, but as a right of all mankind, for the poor and oppressed here, for instance, as the common ground on which at last they shall see justice done, all disguise stripped off and truth declared, God vindicated, and man judged, the hope of a Hereafter persists, and men wait for it as for water to a thirsty soul.

3. And when I have said that some men

of science have sought to discredit it, do not imagine that that is all that science has to say. The soberest view that men have taken of the great theory of Evolution, that theory which has shed light on so many fields, this view of the world of created things which sees in everything a slow triumphant progress from matter inanimate up to man endowed with mind and heart and will and aspirations reaching out beyond himself and up to God, is that it all points to a life beyond. It finds in man a being with capacities fitted for more than this earth can supply and satisfy. And it finds that this is true not simply of the race, but of the individual. Here is how John Fiske puts it:—'The more thoroughly we comprehend that process of Evolution by which things have come to be what they are, the more we are likely to feel that to deny the everlasting persistence of the Spiritual Element in man is to rob the whole process of its meaning. It goes far toward putting us to permanent intellectual confusion. . . . For my own part, I believe in the immortality of the soul . . . as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work.' That

is John Fiske's view, and few men are better entitled to speak of the bearings of Evolution than he.

From another and strange quarter, too, we are offered support for the belief in a world beyond. Hudson, Professor James, the late F. W. H. Myers, all of them careful inquirers along the lines of what they call Psychical Research, and what ordinary folks call Spiritualism, give it as their deliberate opinion that what truth can be discovered there amid a mass of absurdity and imposture does point in the direction of a world of Spirit and a life, not disembodied, but independent of our present mortal bodies, and beyond the grave. Now to take this as the conclusive evidence of the legitimacy of the belief is, I feel, to rest on a broken reed. But the significant thing is that so many are eager to welcome this evidence. Why is it so? It is because it seems to confirm an instinct which they feel to be true, which asserts itself against all attempts to discredit it, and of which they are glad to have something to offer as a justification to men who ask proofs of the unprovable, as are all innate ideas like personal

identity, and objective reality, and the law of cause and effect,—first principles of thought of which it is absurd to ask a proof. What is the weight we can and may attach to what Psychical Research has said? Its fascination and the welcome which its assurances receive prove how keen is the instinct in man for immortality, and how eager he is for evidence to prove his instinct legitimate and true. And what is perhaps of more value from this side still is that these same investigators, or rather the Society with which they are connected, not long ago issued a paper of inquiries to large numbers of people to find out if there really was as widespread and deep an interest in this matter as is commonly maintained, or if it had not died down or fallen dormant. And the replies they got simply surprised them by the evidence they afforded of the extent, persistence, and firmness of the belief.

4. But if this be so, why is it that men look to such flimsy support as Spiritualism, even when dignified with the names of Theosophy and Psychical Research, and ignore the great cogent argument that confirms the instinct of their nature? Why do they hope

for something from mediums and spooks, and ignore the Risen Saviour and the Revelation in Him? For that is the confirmatory argument, an incontestable fact which nothing can dislodge or confute. Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

As I take it, there are three reasons:—(*a*) The first reason is this,—and it has reacted to cause further perplexity among Christians who originally had no doubts on the matter,—the purely formal way in which the belief in Christ's resurrection and the truth as revealed in Him is held by many professed Christians. It produces no effect in their lives. They live as if they had nothing to live for but the things of time. Professing to be risen with Christ, they do not set their affections on things above, but on things on the earth. And judging on the sound principle expressed so tersely by the Searcher of hearts, 'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' that it is mere formalism for a man to say he believes in a Hereafter and to live a life in which not a single thought, saying, or deed, is influenced by the belief, men say—and they are not

entirely to blame for saying it—the 'Christian faith is worth nothing. If I thought I had as good ground for believing in a hereafter as the Christian says he has, I would live a very different life from what many of them do.' Remember, I am not speaking of practice of vice, but of the worldliness, the love of the world, that engrosses many so-called Christian hearts, and which resolves their faith into this: 'I believe in a Hereafter: but I'll attend to it hereafter. Meantime I am taken up with here and now. And the here and the hereafter have practically nothing to do with one another.' Now that is not the Christian faith, the Christian revelation. Yet men calling themselves Christians behave as if it were, and other men treat it for what it is worth, and that is, nothing at all. But even with serious-minded men the case is not entirely different. There is perhaps no more acute observer of the realities of present-day spiritual life than the author of *Mark Rutherford.* In his story, *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, he describes an earnest young fellow who had been brought up in a Christian church, and who

latterly lost his wife. And he says that for him, in his grief, his religion did nothing. That is to say, a religion, at whose very core stands the Conqueror of death, the Resurrection and the Life, did nothing to help this man to understand and bear his grief, caused by Death. I do not take that as an impeachment of the religion, but I do take it as an impeachment of the way in which that religion had been presented to him, or of the way in which he had applied himself to it, or both. How would it be with you? How has it been with you in similar circumstances? Has the fact that Jesus is the Risen Saviour, who has proved His power over death by His resurrection, has the fact of His resurrection come home to you with absolutely reassuring power in that hour of strain? No? Well, that must have been either because you never thought of it—and for that you have only yourself to blame—or else you do not really believe it or attach any living personal meaning to it. And this failure of Christians to turn their faith to practical account in the regulation of life, or in the hour of strain, is

one reason why, in spite of this revelation and in spite of this fact of a risen Christ, men remain in perplexity as to the Hereafter. Turn that fact to account, Christian, and your perplexity will disappear.

(*b*) But there is a subtler reason why men ignore this. They do not like the future as revealed in Jesus Christ. A good deal of the perplexity is not so much as to the fact of a Hereafter, but as to what will be the nature of the Hereafter. Now these are things about which Christ is quite explicit. I leave aside all the details of the matter and only make the general remark on them that all language that is material with regard to them, such, for instance, as the description of heaven as a banquet, or hell as a place where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched, is to be taken figuratively, and as descriptive of mental and spiritual states and experiences, not of mere physical delight or pain. But Christ makes it quite plain that there is to be a life after death; that the state of it will either be unspeakable joy and gladness like God's own, or unutterable misery; that which it is to be, will be decided not by the views we

have professed, but by the lives we have lived here, not by the mere experiences through which we have come, but by the way we have lived and acted in the midst of these experiences. It will be determined by a judgment carried out on moral principles, with full account taken of the advantages or disadvantages which men have enjoyed,—to whom much has been given, of them shall much be required. And this great fact of a judgment placed right on the threshold of the Hereafter by Jesus Christ, which calls men and women up sharply to the solemn issues of a Hereafter, is too much for careless, thoughtless, frivolous minds, animated by mere languid curiosity, and who would like to hear that the Hereafter was to be a lazy, voluptuous lotus-eating, into which men—all men, good or bad—glide out of the storm and stress of life. They do not want a Hereafter that is serious, so they neglect the life beyond as revealed in and by Jesus Christ, and try by implication to belittle His evidence and look for something else. That should make every follower of Christ more convinced of the truth as it is in Christ.

(*c*) And the third reason is closely akin to this. It is the conditions on which Christ says the Hereafter may be enjoyed. Note these words; the conditions on which the Hereafter may be enjoyed. The man who will find Hell in the Hereafter can scarcely be said to be about to enjoy the Hereafter. I mean no sarcasm in that; the subject is too tragic; I only wish to make my meaning clear. Neither Christ nor His Apostles say very much about the future for the wicked. And gruesome details on which some natures descant and gloat have no warrant from Him. He solemnly keeps the curtain down on the fate of the lost, or only gives such glimpses of horror as should command us to great reserve on the subject. The most significant thing is that while He indicates the continuance and persistence of their existence, He does not think it worthy of the name of life. Existence in the future which will deserve the name of life can only come to the man who has true life here. On the other hand, the man who has life, true life, what Christ calls life, life like His own, life which is Christ's own divine life in him, can never lose it. Its

nature is the argument for its continuance. It is the result of union with Christ by faith. And that union is the outcome of contrition for sin, and a visit for pardon to the Cross. It finds its daily expression in a steady resistance of sin and practice of holiness here on earth. And death cannot touch that any more than it could touch Christ Himself. It must last as long as Christ Himself. When death does come to such a spirit, the experience is only what the poet describes:—

> '. . . A mystic shape did move
> Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;
> And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,
> "Guess now who holds thee." "Death," I said. But there
> The silver answer rang—"Not death, but love."'

And in the arms of love His beloved fall asleep, and shall live, must live. 'I give unto them eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.' It is the Divine logic of true life, no bald syllogism. Christ is the middle term, the Major that includes the Minor. Because He lives, we shall live also. The man truly united with Jesus Christ is the man who has no cause for perplexity, no doubt, no fear. And that man is the man whose whole

life is dominated by the spirit and principles of Jesus Christ. He shuns sin. He loves holiness. He lives the humble, helpful life that wins the 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.' But that is why thousands who would like to be sure of a happy eternity can never feel sure of it, never get any assurance even from Christ. It is because they will not take eternal life on Christ's terms, and they can neither have it nor the peaceful certainty of it on any other. If men will not accept Christ, I know not how to ease them of perplexity. They still must cry with Claudio—

'Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
Of those, that lawless and incertain thoughts
Imagine howling! 'Tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a Paradise
To what we fear in death.'

Out of Christ, I can give no assurance of anything better; I can testify of the certainty of existence beyond the grave, but can speak of it with no hope. But in Christ the future is sure, and bright with hope. It is to be for ever with the Lord; to dwell in the home of many mansions; to enjoy the rest which is not idleness, the work which is not weariness, the friendship which never palls. It is to dwell in the land of which Saint Bernard sang:—

'O sweet and blessed country,
The home of God's elect!
O sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect!
Jesus, in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest,
Who art with God the Father
And Spirit ever blest.'

# THE CREDULITY OF UNBELIEF

'God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.'—PAUL.

# CHAPTER XI

## THE CREDULITY OF UNBELIEF

THERE is 'a miracle of blindness.' There is a startling word of Jesus Christ's that sheds some light upon that miracle, 'because I tell you the truth, therefore ye believe Me not.' He is speaking not of news that seems too good to be true, but of news too serious to be pleasant. And Paul explains the miracle of blindness; 'God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.' It is a judgment from God on deliberate rejection of the truth because it runs counter to our whims, our passions, or our gains. And doubt, scepticism, or unbelief, only really becomes a serious, soul-imperilling matter when, on the moral side, this is its natural history. But all doubt, scepticism, or unbelief, that is from pride or perversity hugged, paraded, or persisted in, that is not to be treated simply as a painful stage on the way

to higher truth and certainty, to well-assured belief, tends to beget the very same mental debility, and to leave men an easy prey to 'strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.' The translation is not very accurate, but it expresses substantially the sense. And it epitomises what I want to direct attention to, namely, the Credulity of Unbelief.

Doubt, unbelief, is a not uncommon stage in spiritual development. Doubts are often but the growing pains of the spirit, and are not to be treated too seriously. No one who has read the late Dr. Cairns' *Life* can forget how he viewed the matter, or how half-humorously he wrote to one brother of the stage reached by another in his intellectual growth, 'out of throes of doubt he has reached this,' he said, 'that he can at least accept his own existence as a working hypothesis from which to make a start.' That doubter on the way to certainty might have said, with the poet:—

> '. . . In the darkness of my mind
> When the night's night of misery was most black
> A little star came twinkling up within,
> And in myself I had a guide that led,
> And in myself had knowledge of a soul.'

That unbelief is not serious, but stimulative; and if treated sympathetically, it helps a man to grasp for himself the realities of faith, and to hold the truth, not at second, but at first hand. The unbelief that is dangerous and disastrous is the unbelief which is deliberate and confirmed, which is arrogant and proud. It is the product of intellectual conceit, of the pride of reason, and reason's claim to sole authority in the affairs of the spirit. And it is against this unbelief I wish to establish a charge of credulity, of a proneness to accept conclusions on flimsy evidence, to welcome theories and schemes of a trumpery and irrational type, give them an amount of respect and attention that is absurd, and all simply because they conflict with essential Christian truth. Such unbelief is very ready to rail against believers in Jesus Christ on the score of their credulity, to make merry over what it regards as their superstitions, held in the face of plain common-sense. My purpose is to retort the charge in an intensified degree. I do not forget that a mere *tu quoque*—'you're another'—argument does not go far; two blacks do not make a white. But some purpose is served when it is

shown that after all credulity, if credulity it be, cannot be imputed to confessed believers alone; but lies at the root of cherished opinions, confident assertions, and axiomatic dicta of their severest critics. They also have their beliefs; for which no more, if not much less, can really be said than ever they will admit may be urged for the beliefs they scorn.

(1) Take an extreme case, the case of the atheist, the man who says there is no God. That was a common enough position in France in the latter part of the eighteenth century. It had its high priests, like Diderot and Voltaire. And it is worth while noticing how completely they and their school of the Encyclopædists have died out, have lost the attention of thinking men. An admitted atheist is now a rare specimen. Why? Just because the extravagance of his assertion has been found out. The credulity of his unbelief has been laid bare. Men have seen with clearer vision that to ask them to assent to this opinion that there is no God, is to ask too much for their intelligence. It is to ask them to believe that the Universe, this world, themselves, exist without cause or purpose. It is to give up all attempts

at a rational account of the world. And on what evidence? Simply on the failure of the five physical senses to discover God; simply because those lower faculties of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, which man shares with the brute, cannot demonstrate or find God, therefore, no matter what our natural instincts, intuitive perceptions, imagination, emotion, sense of moral responsibility, faith—all indeed that differentiates us from the other animals, and makes us men—may say, there is no God. What is that but credulity, absurdity, irrationality? No wonder Carlyle says of that state of mind, 'The sanctuary of man's soul must stand perennially shut against this man; where his hand ceases to grope, the world ends; within such strait conditions has he to live and labour; and naturally, to distort and dislocate, more or less, all things he labours on: for whosoever, in one way or another, recognises not the Divine idea of the world, which lies at the bottom of appearances, can rightly interpret no appearance; and whatsoever spiritual thing he does, he must do it partially, do it falsely.' It is the fool that hath said in his heart, there is no God.

(2) This phase disappeared, however, only to give place to another, which does not say there is no God; but that if there is, men cannot know Him, or at most, not more than this, that He is neither moral in character nor practically active in the affairs of the universe. That again I can only characterise as credulity. For what better than that is the ignorance of the agnostic? The former, that God is not moral, is the position of the pessimist. He believes nothing but ill of the world. Put in a broad way, he regards this as the worst world possible; everything in it is going to the bad; and the condition is irretrievable. The agnostic sees the dogmatism of this, and contents himself with saying, that, if there is a God, when once He had created the world and set it going, He apparently left it to the operation of its own laws, which are inevitable and inexorable in their operation, laws of gravitation and evolution and retribution, laws of heredity and environment, with which He does not, cannot, dare not interfere, and therefore their operation affords no evidence of what He really is, and we have no other means of discovering. Now by shutting one eye very hard, it may be pos-

sible to regard the world in this way. It may be conceivable that God may be a devil, a self-fettered prisoner, or an Epicurean, but it would take an almost superhuman effort to believe it. When we try, we are constrained to say, looking in one direction, for instance—

'Is it true that poetical power,
The gift of heaven, the dower
Of Apollo and the Nine,
The unborn sense, "the vision and the faculty divine,"
All we glorify and bless
In our rapturous exaltation,
All invention, and creation,
Exuberance of fancy, and sublime imagination,
All a poet's fame is built on,
The fame of Shakespeare, Milton,
Of Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley,
Is in reason's grave precision
Nothing more, nothing less,
Than a peculiar conformation,
Constitution, and condition,
Of the brain and of the belly?
Is it true, ye gods who cheat us?
And that's the way ye treat us?
O say it, all who think it,
Look straight and never blink it.
If it is so, let it be so,
And we will all agree so;
But the plot has counter plot,
It may be, and yet be not.'

And the same is true of the whole round of nature's boons and human gifts and graces.

These things may be the result of mere accident or blind chance; they may all say nothing of the true character of their Creator; the thousand signs that seem to indicate His brooding care for His creatures, like a father caring for every member of his household, may all mean nothing, be utterly deceptive and misleading; but it will require a man of a very gullible nature to take that in. It will require a man, indeed, with a mind that works like that of the child whom Gorky describes who, after hearing tales from his nurse of the prowess and skill of the highwaymen and robbers, because his father was big and rough and strong and shaggy, was perfectly sure he must be a robber. If this is not the confidence of credulity, I don't know what is.

(3) Take again the Bible as it has passed through the hands of the extremists among its higher critics. There are many reverent men among critics whose conclusions are legitimate and reasonable, and shed new and valuable light on the Old Testament, and are real aids to faith. But take as a type of those I mean Canon Cheyne, the editor,—one might almost say the author,—of the *Encyclopædia*

*Biblica*. I hope I am doing him no injustice when I class him as a kind of unbeliever. He certainly does not believe in the Bible as a reliable message from God, as most do. Or if he does, it is as extraordinary a feat of faith, or rather superstition, as one can imagine. But what do you find in his work? Trace his view of the history of Israel as it can be found by reading a series of his articles in this Dictionary, and you find its whole historic credibility crumble away into dust, the very Hebrew language becomes a collection of facile vocables that at the bidding of a skilful magician will dissolve and re-form to produce any word, particularly Jerahmeel, to suit his convenience. The story of a sojourn in Egypt for Israel, a wilderness journey, a settlement in Canaan, conflicts there with neighbouring peoples and distant empires, are all the glorified exaggerations of petty strifes between the tiny tribes of Jerahmeel and Judah. And let a man just go with this diviner's rod, Jerahmeel, and everywhere in historic books, in prophecies, or in Psalms, he will touch the true springs, and see from whence the scriptures really flow. Can you believe this? For

my part I feel it is pure insanity, and that if historic criticism is to preserve a right to a hearing from intelligent men, it ought to disclaim Professor Cheyne. And if it be not insanity, I hold that the man who can accept it is capable of a credulity before which the crassest adherent of the dryest traditionalism is a keen-eyed rationalist.

(4) Or again, take the history of Christianity. In an earlier chapter on 'How does Christianity persist?' we saw how much there was in the history of Christianity that was enough to make any man who loved it blush with shame, and any man who was outside of it pause before casting in his lot with it. We saw that the only countervailing asset was its extraordinary recuperative power, which had its explanation in the presence within it of the promised Spirit of its Founder and its power of return to Him, which had enabled it, in spite of the scandals and abuses, to develop in thousands a character, a conscience, and a faith, that made them the regenerative leaven in human society. And we feel that the only rational account, the only adequate account, of this persistent fact of two millenniums is

in the peerless character and person of its Founder, the Lord Jesus Christ. How is this treated by those who claim to give a purely rational account of Christianity? I take a typical specimen, *A Short History of Christianity*, by J. M. Robertson. I find there every ill thing that can be said of Christianity duly set forth. I find what is to its credit but grudgingly admitted. The fact of its tremendous influence, be it for good or for evil, cannot of course be denied, but with that proneness to ignore the value of the religious, which Mr. Benjamin Kidd in his *Social Evolution* so thoroughly exposed, it is determinedly belittled. And yet the author is so little confident of the exhaustion of Christianity that he will not dare to say that its day is done. But will you believe it, the earlier chapters of his book are devoted to prove that there never really was any Jesus, that he is entirely a myth, Matthew's Gospel a play, the twelve apostles nothing but a set of money collectors, Peter a mere literary creation, and Judas Iscariot not an individual, but a Joudaios, the conventional miscreant Jew of any early mystery play! According to him the

whole original nucleus of Christian belief was in reality but a conglomerate of Jewish Messianic expectations and Egyptian and Greek mythology, owing its existence to nobody knows who or nobody knows what. And we are asked to accept this as the true rational account of the origin of what has been the mightiest influence in the shaping of the world's history for nineteen hundred years! Are we not entitled to speak of the man who can believe all that as capable of believing anything, as one who in his anxiety to escape from tradition and superstition, is the victim of the grossest credulity, as one who, starting with the resolve to listen to nothing but reason, has ended by falling a prey to any old wives' fable?

It is when one takes up point after point like this, and ponders them, that he realises the legitimacy of the argument of a book like Mr. Ballard's, *The Miracles of Unbelief*. Well may he do as he does, and show there how far beyond any demands upon our faith made by the presence of the supernatural in the Christian religion we are carried into the marvellous, the miraculous, by attempts to evade or deny it.

If it is true that 'nature thrust out with a pitchfork comes back some other way,' still more true is it of the supernatural. And as we read the lame attempts of unbelief to account for a world in which the light of revelation and grace has been put out, we are reminded of Maeterlinck's play, *Les Aveugles*, where the poor blind wanderers who had wearied their guide to death with their peevishness and discontent, find themselves at last without him, helpless, heartless, hopeless, a prey to nameless fears, and powerless to help or comfort one another.

(5) It is not surprising that where, under the shield of reason, such credulity as I have spoken of has been able to assert itself and has spread, it should have been accompanied by an outcrop of very crass superstition, to which the supposed emancipated have shown themselves prone to revert. Not to travel far afield, take our own day. Perhaps one of the worst of all superstitions is that enshrined in Roman Catholicism. All its different elements of infallibility, priesthood, mass, saint-worship, confessional, penance, etc., go to bolster up the pretension that it can act as a reliable and

authoritative go-between between the soul and God. But how can any rational being believe that? Even if there were no perfect Mediator in the God-Man, I cannot understand how any self-respecting man would believe that any other mere man had a better right of entry to God than he had himself. And yet men of the gifts of Manning, Newman, Faber, all betook themselves to it. Why? Because of intellectual, moral, and spiritual cowardice. Afraid to think for themselves, appalled at where Reason had led many before them in the previous century, they lost faith in God and clung to Mother Church, and had the credulity to swallow her absurd pretensions. See again the Mormon movement in America. Where did it come from? It came from a huge fra[illegible] practised by a wholesale liar and cheat, Joe Smith. And yet it is embraced by men and women turning away in a decadent age from the faith in Jesus Christ whose demand is for loyalty to the simple, the sincere, the pure, and the true, as the very essence of spirituality. Look how multitudes who have grown indifferent to the Gospel, subverted by cheap sneers at its doctrines and principles as old-fashioned, tradi-

tional, unscientific, superstitious, lend a ready ear to palmistry, spiritualism, occultism, Christian science. They accept without question a verdict against Christianity from ill-informed, second-hand criticism, which they never attempt to verify, and so—as Renan says—have not even 'earned their right to disbelieve Christianity.' They persuade themselves that 'Science,' 'Criticism,' 'Evolution,' etc., which to them are but catchwords, have exploded the historical basis for Christianity, and so its day is done. And then they give ear to solemn nonsense that tells them how long they are to live and whom they are to marry, by peering at lines in their hand. They believe a world of spirit has been demonstrated at last because they have seen a table mysteriously turn or rap on the floor, or have read *The Romance of Two Worlds* by a novelist with a fantastic imagination. They believe all the ills of humanity are to come to an end if they can only keep healthy, and that they can be assured of perfect health if they will but attend to the advice of an elderly lady, Mrs. Eddy, herself a chronic invalid. What is all that but the credulity of unbelief? Tired

of the simple, practical truth of the gospel, of the way of salvation at the Cross by faith and repentance, too indolent to consider the profound truths of the gospel, which require thought not fancy, study not excitement, test by practice in daily life, not at dark seances or fashionable social functions, they are given over to 'strong delusion that they should believe a lie.' Thus faith and its fruits stand out in strong contrast with credulity and its superstitions and deceptions.

(6) When I ask myself what is the explanation of this strange phenomenon, this combination of what purports to be enlightenment and credulity, for one thing I am reminded of the old familiar tale of the sailor boy come home. Questioned of the wonders he had seen, he told many a tough yarn, until he exhausted his power of invention with his flight that in the Red Sea on lifting their anchor they understood when they had it aboard why it was so heavy to weigh,—it had caught on and brought up one of Pharaoh's chariot wheels! All this was heard with open ears and quick belief. He was at last reduced to simple truth and told of the flying-fish he

had seen playing about the bows of the ship; and he now was met with protest and incredulity, and charged with imposition! And there is that in modern credulity; men 'professing themselves to be wise have become fools.'

But there is more. Here is a silent testimony to the place and rights of Faith. It is the revenge of outraged faith on the arrogance of Reason. There is no more pretentious faculty in the human constitution than reason. It is placed there to be the handmaid of all, to check extravagance in thought, imagination, emotion, will. But that is not a position which reason is always content to fill. It wishes to dictate to all. It would like to become a creative, and not simply a deliberative faculty. And chafing under its own sterility it often applies its cold hands to the offspring of the heart, the fancy, or the will, and chills them to death or mangles them into ludicrous deformity. But then the laugh is not against them, but against the maladroitness of mere intellect. It might describe, as has been said, a Beethoven quartette for strings as a scraping of horses' tails on cats' bowels. Quite true,

but so much the worse for it, if that is all reason has to say about music. And it is because it has treated faith in the same way that faith's revenge has come, and reason has been found linked arm in arm with faith's counterfeit, credulity. We would all agree with the stoutest rationalist or unbeliever that it is wrong to believe anything on insufficient evidence. But good evidence is not to be bowed out of court because of arrogant pretensions and preconceived prejudices, and it is nothing but pretension and prejudice that refuses to faith a place in the human heart, where she has an independent right of testimony as to the things of the Spirit. Here is the faculty by which our human nature goes out into the Unseen, lays hold upon the Unseen, feels the substance of things hoped for, and on the ground of what it knows, bids us face the duties of to-day and the coming of to-morrow. It has found God there, and it has recognised Him afresh in our midst in Jesus Christ, and hailed Him as the Son of God. It has found meaning and material for those aspirations of the soul which we call religious. And when all this has been belittled, scoffed

at, silenced, need we wonder that the hungry faculty, denied its proper food, becomes depraved and turns to that which is not bread, but husks that the swine did eat? And so the very credulity of unbelief is testimony to the reasonableness of faith. It is a great reminder that—

> 'Yet when all is thought and said,
> The heart still overrules the head;
> Still what we hope, we must believe,
> And what is given us receive;
> Still must believe, for still we hope,
> That in a world of larger scope,
> What here is faithfully begun
> Will be completed, not undone.'

# THE AVERAGE MAN'S RELIGION

"Be not righteous over much."—Ecclesiates.

# CHAPTER XII

## THE AVERAGE MAN'S RELIGION

THERE is rather a curious text, if taken by itself, in the Book of Ecclesiastes: 'Be not righteous over much.' It is one which, perhaps, it would be as well for a minister, who is anxious that his congregation should be aglow with earnestness in spiritual things, to leave buried in the obscurity of the Book of Ecclesiastes—a book which people do not read much—in the hope that it may not be noticed. It reads so like an endorsement of the attitude towards religion of the latitudinarian, and is in such marked contrast to the usual strenuous note of Scripture. No wonder its presence has caused a good deal of surprise and has called out a good deal of ingenuity to explain its presence. A glance at these explanations in turn will bring us to the true mind of Scripture on the matter, and to its mind on what I venture to call the Average Man's Religion.

First of all there are two classes who are poles asunder, and yet, as extremes meet, so do they. They agree that if these words mean just what stands on the face of them, they cannot be part of a revelation from God. The one class who say this are those who have a hard and fast view of inspiration, which insists on treating every statement by itself as a direct word, dictated by God. The other, apparently entirely liberated from this bondage to the letter, yet seem to think that only on some such artificial plan could God give us a reliable message from Himself, and because they do not see how to interpret this statement on these lines, they say it is proved that the Book of Ecclesiastes, with statements of this kind in it, cannot be from God, and accordingly reject the whole book. That is not what the first class do. They say this is God's word. But here righteous does not mean righteous in a good sense. It means, do not run into extravagance in religion. Do not be quixotic in it. It means, do not show off; do not be sanctimonious, hypocritical, as we say, goody-goody.

Now that gives sense, excellent sense. That

gives valuable counsel, though it is not the meaning of the passage. And it is worth while to lay it to heart. There is such a thing as hyper-conscientiousness, a magnifying of trivialities into matters of conscience, where no question of right or wrong is really involved. There is a morbid sense of obligation, say, to introduce explicitly religious topics into conversation, or to raise questions of personal religion in general company, but it is done so incongruously and mechanically as to defeat the very object the well-meaning man had in view. And that is not the end of the evil. It has a prejudicial effect in more ways than one. It leads men to treat attention to these trifles, these habits of galvanised religious talk, as if they were the essential and indispensable features of a truly godly man, and so to the belittling of the really important matters of Christian faith and life. Or again, these mere externals are so easily imitated while the heart of things is never reached, that the hypocrite can earn a cheap reputation for being a righteous man. The consequence of this is, the encouragement of that type of Pharisee who was so common in our

Saviour's day and so offensive to Him, and whose ostentatious type of religion is most prejudicial to the interests of vital godliness. It is the excuse for all those travesties like Burns's 'Address to the Unco Guid.' It brings a reproach on all serious, earnest efforts to promote a high tone of morality and piety in the community. A world that takes ill with the rebuke of its levity and frivolity is quick to retaliate, and does not care to discriminate between the gold and its imitations, and as a dissuasive from that whole type of conduct, and understood in that sense, the word is a timely one; 'be not righteous over much.

But there is another class who, if they knew it, would regard this text as a perfect godsend. They would take it as the condonation from Scripture of the little better than utter indifference with which they regard all moral and religious concerns. Tacitly it is made their motto by thousands of professedly Christian men, 'Be not righteous over much.' There is no sense, they think, in being too religious. Of course religion has its place like other things, deserves a certain amount of thought

and attention, but it is neither exclusively, nor supremely, nor urgently, important. Am I uncharitable in saying that that is the creed of an enormous number of professing Christians and of a still larger number who are by courtesy reckoned Christians and in a rough way reckon themselves as Christians simply because they live in what is called a Christian land, even although they make no profession at all about the matter? Judged by what we can see, might we not say that that is the religious position of the average man, not very good, not very bad, pursuing a path which exhibits neither excessive virtue nor excessive vice? His principle, if not his profession,—and he is glad to hear that he can quote Scripture for it,—is not, be irreligious, but 'be not righteous over much.'

But look fairly at this religion of the average man, both on the ethical and the spiritual side. Its common characteristic is its vagueness, its hesitancy, its indefiniteness, its anxiety to draw the line, in case it is let in for too much of a good thing. I have no wish to be unfair or to overstate the case, but this defect shows all along the line. There is a deficiency both

on the moral and on the spiritual side. The man has neither a very exalted code of morals nor a very high type of living. He has no very good record in the matter of public or private worship, no very vivid spiritual experience, no very clear conception of the essentials of Christian truth. In life he is content to do as others do. Public opinion is his standard of right and wrong. It never occurs to him that Christ challenges all that low compromising conventionalism with a challenge, 'What do ye more than others?' It has never occurred to him that Christ meant him to act on the principle of self-sacrifice and the golden rule, although others are neglecting it. Time enough to begin that, he thinks, when it is the general practice. As for the experiences and exercises of the religious life, he scarcely ever prays or reads the Bible by himself. He has never in his life thought of going to a prayer-meeting. He attends church in a perfunctory way, but with little thought of any good it is to do him. He never had any deep religious crisis in his life, when the things of time seemed to shrink into insignificance, and God stood up before him as the only great reality

with whom at all costs he must come to terms. He has only the vaguest ideas about the meaning of the mission of Jesus, or of the need for His death on the Cross. He has no intelligent ideas about the Holy Spirit and His work in the souls of men. As for enthusiasm about missions at home or abroad, about temperance, about the place of Christian principles in the politics of town or country, business or commerce, it is all faddism to him, an intrusion. Religion should be kept in its own place, and that is a very small one.

But if that is accurate, you say, is such a man a Christian at all? Has he any religion? Oh yes! He has a religion, and I shall tell you what it is; but whether it is entitled to be called Christian or not, that is another matter. He believes there is a God. He hates a dirty trick. He hopes in some way or other to get to heaven. He thinks that Jesus and His death has something to do with that result, but what precisely it is, he has no clear idea. That is about the whole of it. Not but what if you got him on the quiet, or in a confidential or argumentative mood, he would offer his opinion readily on a score of other matters

and put naïve questions that only would betray his ignorance and spiritual poverty without a suspicion on his part that he was doing so. But what I have stated is about the net sum of his religion. And is not that a fair account of the moral and spiritual position of thousands of men and women in this country of ours? And will you tell me if that is Christianity?

Press men of that type, and in defence they will plead something very like the sentiment in Ecclesiastes. It does not do, they urge, to ignore everything for the sake of religion. It does not do to be righteous over much. There is a limit to everything. And one might readily assent to that and yet find grave fault with what is no better than a sham and a pretence. For this is not religion at all. It is either atheism or superstition. And it is just because this is the inevitable issue of all that type of thought about higher things which bargains with them about a how much and a too much and an over much, that we need to be frank and straight about it. This, however, is what the Preacher is aiming at when he says, 'be not righteous over much.' This is the type of life and religion that he has in view when he is

laying that strange injunction upon men. He does not mean, don't run into extravagance in religion: the words mean, 'restrict your religion to the narrowest, most meagre, limits.'

So it is an imperative necessity to ask how could the Preacher, how could the Bible, a book of counsels from God, ever say any such thing. Could it really mean it? To get at the answer we must call in the aid of a much-abused person, namely, what is commonly called a Higher Critic. That is not a pretentious name, meaning an upsetting person, who claims to know more than his neighbours. It is the technical term to describe a man who is not content simply to stop at the words of a text, but who believes that when a man wrote a book he intended the paragraphs to have sense as well as the sentences; the book as a whole to teach a lesson as well as single chapters. He is a man who believes you do not get the sense of any single verse till you see its connection with the whole. And when he looks at this verse in that way, he finds that here you have a part of one of the experiments in life which the writer says he tried. He tried this plan of being neither too good nor too

bad, the plan of trying to make a compromise between them, and to walk taking hold of one with each hand, according to the graphic figure of Eccl. vii. 18. But the final result to which he came was that it is vanity, another failure. It won't do; it can't be done. And the man who tries it will find himself first offering excuses for, and then participating in, some of the vilest habits that human wickedness has invented. And so looking at the whole passage you find that in reality this text simply pillories a fatal mistake. It takes that kind of life that makes 'be not righteous over much' its motto, and stigmatises it as a soul-destroying snare.

The average man, as I have called him, should consider that. Any who have a sneaking sympathy with that mode of life should consider that. Any who have been condoning their own listlessness in religious matters by telling themselves that it was not expected of everybody to take as much interest in these things, or to be as particular about what they do or do not do in business or on Sabbath, as elders or ministers or ministers' families, should consider that. 'Be not righteous over much' has

been discovered to be a discreditable and dangerous motto for any man, and a life lived on that principle is sure to end in failure.

Average men are capable of so much better things. Here is a description of the Average Man, for instance:

'His face had the grimness of granite;
It was bleached and bronzed by the sun
Like the coat on his poor narrow shoulders,
And his hands showed the work he had done.
His dim eyes were weary and patient,
And he smiled through his pallor and tan
A wistful, sad smile, as if saying
"I'm only an average man.

'"I can't be a hero or poet,
Nor a dictator wearing a crown,
I am only the hard-working servant
Of those set above me. I'm down,
And it's no use complaining—
I'll get on the best way I can,
And one of these days'll come morning
And rest for the average man."

'He wages all battles and wins them,
He builds all turrets that tower
Over walls of the city to tell
Of the rulers and priests of the hour.
Without him the general is helpless,
The earth but a place and a plan.
He moves all, and clothes all, and feeds all,
This sad smiling average man.'

That is true; the Bible knows that is true.

And why should the man of whom all that is true settle down to paltry views about right and wrong, about the soul and God. Of course his lot is often a hard one, and the task of meeting the world and fighting what often seems a dismal enough battle and a forlorn hope, day after day, week after week, is depressing enough and apt to make a man sordid. And yet, and yet,—read John Davidson's poem on the married London clerk with a wage of what he calls 'thirty bob a week.'

. . . . . .

'"Thy will be done." You say it if you durst!

They say it daily up and down the land
As easy as you take a drink, it's true;
But the difficultest go to understand
And the difficultest job a man can do
Is to come it brave and meek with thirty bob a week
And feel that that's the proper thing for you.

'It's a naked child against a hungry wolf;
It's playing bowls upon a splitting wreck;
It's walking on a string across a gulf
With millstones fore and aft about your neck;
But the thing is daily done by many and many a one,
And we fall, face forward, fighting on the deck.'

Yes, they do, and they are brave fellows. They are capable of nobler and better things than this miserable 'be not righteous over

much.' They are capable at the pinch of acting nobly, in a spirit of magnificent scorn of all that is time-serving and self-seeking. But why should they leave that to be brought home to them and out of them at some earthly crisis, which even at the highest is still short of the great call that is constantly awaiting their response, the call of Jesus Christ to be up and follow Him. If they would respond to that, the very tasks that seem so trivial, so sordid, so monotonous, would take on a new character. Men would see in them a field in which to give battle to the devil on behalf of righteousness. They would see that they could never be too good, 'righteous over much.' At every successful step in the approach to goodness, they would find it still towering above them in its peerless example, Jesus Christ. Do not turn away from what I say with a shrug, as if the attempts were either impossible or not worth the trying. What were Peter and John, David and Amos? Fishermen and shepherds, whose outlook promised nothing but a round of common tasks, men who by their lot were but average men. But they responded to God's approaches.

Religion became to them a very real thing. There was no longer any talk with them of not being righteous over much. They perceived, indeed, that that was an impossibility. But so far from religion stunting their lives, limiting their activities, blighting their prospects, and cancelling all their enjoyment, it really lifted them up to a new plane, and fitted them to the scale of infinity and eternity.

And so let me put in a plea for a moment's thought about Christ. Men thought that he was the Son of God. What made men think it? It was because He was perfectly righteous. Was He too good, righteous over much? What brought God's Son into this world? It was God's disappointment that men were falling short of the standard, afraid of being righteous over much. What set up the Cross and nailed Christ to it? For one thing this, that He would not swerve from the severest demands of righteousness even by a hairsbreadth, even if it cost Him His life. But for another it was this, that men had trifled with righteousness so terribly that they had lost it altogether, and nothing could avert from them the awful consequences of their folly and fear and

shame but that He should intercept them and let them discharge themselves on Him. The Cross of Christ is the fruit of this base counsel, 'be not righteous over much.' If ever there was a snare of the devil to tempt men not by proposing evil but just by relaxing the claims of good, this is it. And to tempted men I cry, beware; to those who have yielded I say, repent. So long as men run in that groove they are on the way to ruin. What they call their religion is as useless as it is poor. Their hope is a delusion, from which the rude awakening will bring despair. Let them repent, think again, and think with shame of that contemptible motto and theory of life, 'be not righteous over much,' that base attempt to side with both God and the devil, a shallow, double hypocrisy. And let them be up and dare and do and live a brave manly life that will shrink from no task in His service with the grudging complaint, 'it is too much.' Let them count nothing excessive that gives an opportunity of some feeble exhibition of the grateful sense which they have of all He has done for them.

# NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.'

JESUS, THE KINGDOM'S KING.

## CHAPTER XIII

### NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

'NOT far from the kingdom of God.' Was that a satisfactory position, or was it not? There is a conventional way of looking at it which is mainly occupied with the *un*satisfactoriness of it. 'Not far from it: not *in* it. The man might just as well be miles away.' A very common way that of looking at the position. It is not Christ's way. He says this of a certain young man with a feeling of genuine respect and admiration for him. For the moment, at any rate, under the quickening influence of the magnetic inwardness of Christ's teaching, so true, so thorough, so real, the scribe—for he was a scribe—with all his traditions had been lost in the man, and he had felt a thrill of responsiveness to Christ which he could not suppress. Against all his prejudices he acknowledged the rare spirit of

Christ's reply to the question he addressed to Him, and the feeling was mutual. Christ and this man drew to one another. There was not much difference between them on the matter of the supreme demand of God. And Christ says so. 'Thou art not far from the truth; you are pretty near the mark; there is not very much wrong with your views.' That is what Christ means. He talks like a canny Scot. And what does a Scot mean when he says a man is not far wrong? Certainly not that he is as hopeless as if he were utterly astray. Christ meant to commend and encourage the man. 'When he saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' If Christians are to learn to appreciate aright a hundred characters, and views, and movements that do not exactly correspond with their own, they must take notice of Christ's attitude when He said this.

Now what is the kingdom of God? The phrase is hardly ever out of Christ's mouth. What did He mean by it? What did the men understand by it who heard Him use it? One is safe in saying that His hearers meant one

thing and He another. One side of Christ's work was just to correct the common mistaken notions of what the kingdom of God really was. It was the cynosure, the beau ideal of a Jew's hopes, his *summum bonum*. And because it was this, Jesus took the phrase to describe the true *summum bonum*, or chief good of men, which He had come to bring within their reach. And the phrase was very suitable to describe one distinct aspect of this. He had other names for the same thing, such as 'life,' 'eternal life,' and so on. And in thinking of the meaning of 'kingdom of God' no view is correct which is not interchangeable with its equivalents in Christ's vocabulary. But there is in the phrase itself much that is suggestive. To the Jew it meant an earthly realm of world-wide supremacy, with a Davidic king on the throne, its capital and seat of government in Jerusalem, the Mosaic law and religion strictly enforced in all their details upon all its subjects. The Jews themselves were to be the aristocracy among its citizens, and from them the ruling authorities were to be selected. That was what a Jew looked for in the kingdom of God. To Jesus it meant some-

thing very different, different in kind, not simply different in composition. You do not get at His idea by substituting 'Christian' for 'Jew' in the above description as many who harp on the Jews' return to their own land and a millennial kingdom would have us believe. Such a view is slavery to the letter, complete missing of the spirit, and, worse still, very unspiritual and earthly. It is amazing that spiritually-minded men can be seduced by it. That could never interchange, as I have said it must do to be true, with eternal life. It is simply a repetition of the Jew's mistake which Christ had to correct.

To Christ the kingdom of God was something 'not of this world.' Yet it was no Utopia or dream of a disappointed man. It was possible for it to exist in this world. He could say, 'It is among you.' And in effect it means a society of renovated kindred spirits whose supreme desire and effort is to do the will of their God revealed as a Father in Christ, under Christ's own leadership and control, and do it as loyally in its bearing toward all their fellow-men as devoutly toward their God. That is the kingdom of God.

That is 'life,' 'eternal life.' But when you say 'kingdom,' you are reminded of two things about it. First, God is supreme; second, man's highest good can only be realised in the perfect fulfilment of his relations to other *men*, as well as to God. He is a member of a society, and is dealt with as such, and not simply as an individual with only his own soul, his own life, to look after. That is what Christ says to the scribe. The scribe had asked 'which is the first commandment?' Christ's reply is there is not *one*, but *two*. Or, rather, the one great command has two equally important and inseparable aspects, towards God and towards man. When the overmastering truth of this masterly summary broke upon the man, with a quick surge of admiration for the one who said it, which no habits of sophistry and tradition could suppress, he could but admit how true it was. But then, too, Christ says to him, just because he was sensitive to this truth, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' That is it. That is its law. 'Thou art not far from it.'

'*Not far* from it.' What exactly does that mean? I have indicated the meaning so far

in the opening of this chapter. The canny Scotch ways of non-committal in their speech help us to understand it. It means that the man very nearly understood the kingdom, needed but a little adjustment of view, and a sight of the king, and time to practise the great law which he had discovered, in order to be within the kingdom. But our Saviour is too careful, too exact in His speech, to let a man rest content with this position. 'Not far from' is not the same as 'within.' It indicates sympathy, approximation, appreciation, much of that all unconscious. But it is not the same as within.

There is a parallel to this in our own day. There are movements that are not far from the kingdom of God, which deserve kindly recognition by the sons of the kingdom. And many of these would speedily become parts of the kingdom if only the children of the kingdom were to exercise towards them the generous sympathetic attitude of Jesus toward this man, instead of looking at them askance and treating them as hostile. It is quite true that many of them make no pretence of being Christian, treat the Church of Christ and its

institutions with indifference or, to use an oxymoron, with respectful contempt. Some even regard its existence with hostility. And yet, for all that, there is an unrecognised affinity between their spirit and the spirit of the kingdom of God which its clearer vision ought to enable it to detect and welcome. Look at the hundred and one movements, for instance, which have been called into existence by the spectacle of the world's misery, of its surging masses sunk in privation and destitution and disease, given over to vice and crime. To cope with this you have political schemes; you have socialistic schemes; you have co-operative efforts; you have educational and industrial schemes; you have medical and benevolent schemes; you have organisations called settlements; you have enterprises to get men properly and cheaply fed and housed and clothed. The leaders in many such movements make no pretence of being Christian men. They plead this difficulty and that difficulty in the way of their acceptance of the Christian faith. They are profoundly disappointed at the record of the Christian Church. But they are actuated by an intense desire to improve

the condition in body and mind of their fellows, and they give themselves to its attainment with a whole-hearted zeal and an amount of self-denial that is most beautiful. It is easy to say they are all wrong, to say they are bound to fail because of a radical defect in their view. But it is more Christ-like to see the essentially Christian elements that are manifest in their endeavours, and to recognise that in spirit they are 'not far from the kingdom of God.' Their ideal is very nearly the same as the Christian ideal. Their self-devotion is very like its spirit. And if there is divergence on points of great importance, this will be overcome not by conflict and debate, which will only intensify the feeling of alienation, but by cordial recognition of all that is good and a kindly invitation to search together into their deeper springs.

We recognise how near the scribe was to the kingdom by two things. The first was his quick appreciation of Christ's summary of God's law. He at once saw how intimate was the connection between the two parts. He at once saw how incomplete, how lifeless either was without the other. He at once saw how

completely the life of active love to our fellowmen transcended mere forms of ritual as true worship of God. He recognised the unity in which the distinction between piety and morality is transcended and they become transfused in a true spirituality and religion. But a second equally decisive piece of evidence of his nearness is his honest admission of this. It was Jesus whose words had charmed him, and who had said this, and He was regarded as an utter heretic by the orthodox teachers of His day. He was excommunicated. And it was a brave thing for this man to admit the truth, when it implied, as he felt, a criticism of the common criterion of a man's orthodoxy, and when it was spoken by a man in Christ's position. These two things show how near he really was.

And how did he get there? Two things brought him. The one was loyalty to the teaching of his Bible. Here was a man who had steadily studied the revelation of God which he possessed. He was thoroughly familiar with it and with it all. He knew its laws. He knew its prophets. Their words came to him as the natural expression of his

thoughts. He had felt the thrill of all its teaching. He had not been content with a merely verbal acquaintance with its contents. He had brought his thought to bear on it. And he had many a time been impressed with the deep spirituality of its teaching. He had felt after the soul at the back of things, anxious to reach the very deepest truth of life. In all this he had been loyal to a second authority, his own conscience. That silent monitor within had seemingly often been seriously perplexed by the strange distortion to which the teachings of his fellow-scribes subjected some of the law's plainest lessons. He was distressed by what seemed to him their failure to see the true proportion of things, as they magnified mere forms, putting ceremonies and sacrifices before sympathy and service. And yet those who did so seemed to have so much to say for themselves. He had never been able to formulate the conclusive reply that would controvert or convert them. And so in patient investigation and prayerful expectation he had waited for the light. Now he had found it. Christ showed him the resolution of the problem, the fundamental prin-

ciple of God's kingdom, love, active love, high as heaven and broad as mankind. That satisfied his protesting conscience. And the distorted features of the law were composed to a sweet benignity.

It is very instructive, that. It tells this, that there is not a better road to God and to the light of His truth than just what has been handed down as His revelation of Himself read in the light of the commentary of our own consciences. If men are only loyal to the best truth they have, if they have the courage to apply their own consciences to the criticism of the traditions by which men have often smothered it, they will arrive at something not far from the kingdom of God, and God will regard them with a very friendly eye. And young men and women should consider this when they feel hampered by the constructions which they find put upon the Bible by the creeds of the churches or by the talk of others. They should not hastily throw up the whole thing as if it were a great contradiction and riddle. Rather let them have regard to this, that it has been life to a dying world, light to thousands of groping souls,

and look at it with their own eyes; judge of it with their own consciences; obey it as they understand it, and they will reach the truth, 'not far from the kingdom of God.'

Still I must emphasise what I said, 'not far off' is not the same as 'within.' Golfers have a well-understood phrase, 'never up, never in.' The aim of the game is to get the little ball into the little hole. And the meaning of the phrase is, if you do not play hard enough to get the length of the hole, you will not get into it. It may be a beautiful putt, 'lie on the lip of the hole,' 'a picture.' But 'it is short'; 'never up, never in.' The same is true here. It is beautiful to see an earnest, honest soul feeling his way toward the kingdom, moving steadily towards the light. But you never can be wholly satisfied till he has actually found it. If he is the man I describe, he will not be satisfied himself until he find it. He will discover what is awanting, defective, what that little bit is that still lies between him and the kingdom. With the man Christ was talking to, what was wanted was just the recognition of the King. Christ did not tell him that. He left him to discover it. And it is just the dis-

covery that many a man has to make in order to enter the kingdom. It is the oath of allegiance to Christ, which we commonly call 'faith,' that is still awanting. There are many men of fine character, of generous thoughts and noble lives, whom we naturally and properly admire. And yet there is a defect in them of which even they themselves are conscious, although what it is they do not know. It is the want of the deep recognition of the things that are unseen, the solemn sense of the supremacy of the spiritual. Could that arise in them, they would be in the kingdom and recognise that it is the kingdom of God. And so men can never afford to rest satisfied till they have crowned Christ king in their ransomed hearts. With a quick feeling of self-reproach for blindness, with shame for past neglect of Him Whom now they see and love, with a bold yet humble plea for His forgiveness which they know He will grant because He died for us, they are born again of His spirit, become new creations, men made new, entered into the kingdom of God. There will not be much difference in the outward current of the lives, perhaps, but what a difference in

the enjoyment of the liberty of heart and conscience within! It is the man himself who appreciates the change, who knows the difference between 'not far from the kingdom' and 'within' it. He knows here, as so often, how true are the poet's lines:

> 'Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
> And the little less, and what worlds away!'

It is better to be near than far away. But 'not far from' is not within.

Any one face to face with this verdict of Christ, feeling at once the hopefulness and the unsatisfactoriness of the position, is led to ask himself, Where do I stand? without or within? 'not far from the kingdom of God,' or 'worlds away'? And in the light of the basis on which the judgment is given that question cannot be answered by an appeal to a professed creed. A man must review his life, its motives and principles. Who is king in his heart? What principle regulates the life? Is it Christ? Is it love? What place has God's will, God's approval, God's help, in the planning of his life? Are they recognised as indispensable to true success? And again the

appeal is not to be to what he says, or to the place he gives to the observance of religious worship in public or in private, but to the efforts he is steadily and constantly making to secure the wellbeing and happiness of his fellowmen. It is a kingdom that is aimed at, of which we pray 'Thy kingdom come.' Does the prayer mean anything specific? Translate it into everyday parlance, and for this earth it means, let brotherliness prevail between man and man, and people and people, and let war cease as a hateful thing. It means that he who prays it is as anxious that in the matter of health and worldly comfort other men should be as well off as himself, even if it should cost him a sacrifice to bring this about. It means that he counts the knowledge of Christ as King and the privilege of serving Him —service, not simply salvation through Him, but service of Him—so well worth possessing that he will put himself to inconvenience or privation to let others know of Him and share the blessing. It is by a man's attitude towards these points that he finds out where he is, 'within,' 'not far from' the kingdom, or 'worlds away.' If his life and thought show

that he is quite indifferent to the condition of others so long as he is all right, temporally or spiritually himself, he is not in the kingdom. He is not even near it. If he is very anxious about his fellowmen, but has never thought much about Him Who, above all others, has their cause at heart, has seen farthest into their ills, has done most, has died, to end these ills, and cure men's wounds, the neglect is to be regretted, but the man is of Christ's mind, and not far from the kingdom. If, on the other hand, for Christ's sake a man will do and suffer and rejoice for the welfare of his fellowmen, be his theology as crude, ill-proportioned, undeveloped as you please, he is in the kingdom, a brother by grace of the King.

# WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? HIS CREED

'The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.'

LUKE.

## CHAPTER XIV

### WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? HIS CREED

WHAT is a Christian? Believers in Jesus were so called first in Antioch. And one might try to get at a proper answer to the question by a historical inquiry as to what exactly those who were so called at Antioch knew and believed. Another line of answer is to distinguish between what are essentials and what are accretions, to see what can be given up of commonly accepted Christian belief, and yet a claim be put in by a man to a right to be regarded as in some sense a Christian, entitled to be included under the name. It is, however, not very profitable to proceed in this matter on the line of the irreducible minimum. I am not much in love with the man who comes to me to see what are the lowest terms on which he can establish for himself a claim to think himself a Chris-

tian, with a right to the privileges, promises, and hopes of the Christian. He says in effect, 'You Christians are in the main very credulous, very narrow-minded in your opinions, quite unnecessarily strict in your views of life, and I will not be bound in any of these matters; but you have some very excellent ideas with which I should like to be regarded as identified, should like to patronise, and I should be glad if you would find a place for me—as you should—amongst you.' That is the style of some. But it is a piece of impertinence, and I am not going to water down my Christian faith for any such superior person. Were he a poor anxious soul groping towards the light, I should be glad to point out the simplicity of the way to him. A dictator is a different matter. There is no doubt about humility and its place in Christianity. But what I want to do in this chapter and the next, is to point out what are broad unmistakable characteristics of any true Christian, the Christian about whom there can be no doubt. That is the kind of Christian that is really wanted. And here we shall look at his creed.

There is a practical interest about this question which presents itself when young people are thinking about joining the Church of Christ. Some hesitate and doubt as to whether they have the right. The Church is made up of professing Christians, more or less loyal to their profession. Conscientious young hearts ask themselves, can I make a sincere profession? Am I a Christian? What is a Christian? I would reply that there are four characteristics of a genuine Christian, and the first of them is this.

I. Christians are men of a Book. Christians hold by the Bible. They give it a place and authority in their thought and life which they give to no other book, and a place that no other book holds in the esteem of any other set of religionists. Even the Mohammedan does not give his Koran the place which the Christian gives to the Bible. In proof of this one may ask, for instance, who ever heard of a society the least like the Bible Society, started by Mohammedans, to print and circulate the Koran? The thing speaks for itself. Here is a book which the Christian says every Christian should have, every Christian should

know, every Christian should be able to read for himself. And it is worth while starting schools, wherever representatives of the Christian faith go, if for nothing else, simply to qualify every one to read the Bible. Such devotion to the Bible is a broad characteristic of every true Christian.

But how does a Christian come to hold the Bible in such respect? Briefly, for three reasons. First of all, the Bible has come into his hands from his father and mother, with the assurance that it is God's book, that just as they have handed it to him, their parents handed it to them, and so right down the ages it has come accredited afresh at every stage. There is the whole testimony of the Christian Church from the beginning at the back of them, all saying we have heard God speak here. And no serious or sensible man can afford to belittle a book which comes with such credentials. That commands attention to it. But a second reason is this. The Christian reviews the world of men. He takes note of its finest characters. And he finds that the loftiest conceptions of life, the brightest examples of noble, holy living, are all traceable to the

Bible and the influence of the Bible. Those who have lived under its spell and conformed to its demands and instructions, are those whose lives seem to have most meaning, purpose, and permanent value. And once more as their common spring, the Bible challenges attention and respect. And for a third thing a Christian says, I have read this book myself, and I have heard God's voice in it to me. Its words speak with a directness that indicates that the book comes from the hand of my Maker. It knows me and my ways as only my Maker can. Its voice and my conscience wondrously agree. I know for myself that this is God's word. However historical study may decide as to the way in which its human penmen composed it—whether along the lines that tradition has asserted or on some other plan which has been long forgotten and only late discovery has recovered—it matters not. The voice is God's voice. Reading the Bible in a devout, prayerful spirit God speaks to me there. And I prize the book.

So if a man is to make good his claim to be a Christian, he should have this mark of

devotion to the Book. But more than that, if he has not made the Bible a subject of study, he has not thereby earned a right to deny its claims. The man who studies and rejects, is a man you can have some respect for, but the man who simply neglects, writes himself down a wanton trifler. The Bible by virtue of all its history has earned a right to serious attention from serious men.

II. Christians are men who hold particular views about God. That is the second mark.

Christians are not the only religious people in the world. Christians are not the only people who believe in God. But Christians are the only people who think of God as they do. And when you try to put in a few words what they think and believe, it is this. They believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one God. These words are not found in the Bible. There is no one text that sums up the matter in these terms. And yet that is the distinguishing thought of the Christian about God. That is what distinguishes his view about God from that of every one else. He believes in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one God.

Now that doctrine of the Trinity often seems a very perplexing subject. And no wonder: I, for one, should be very much surprised if, when the truth about God is reached, we should not find something which is very perplexing to human minds, and something which betrays the poverty of human speech. I expect that the truth about the infinite God will always tax the fullest resources of finite minds and tongues, and still leave men wondering, pondering, and adoring. But as a result of this, men often are content simply to take this doctrine of the Trinity on credit, and make no attempt to understand it. And this is not right. Christian belief is not to be credulity. We must never be content with a second-hand faith. We ought therefore to inquire how men came to think thus about God, and to offer us this simple sentence to express our knowledge of Him. It was thus. For one thing, this was the only way in which they could gather up all that was said about God in the Bible. For another, it corresponds to Christian spiritual experience. In the Old Testament they found God in Creation and Revelation. They found Him the Maker of

the World, the Instructor of Patriarchs and Prophets, the great Invisible I am, the object of their worship. But they found too this same God bidding them expect His Advent in this world; Himself, yet not in a way they had ever known Him before; still entitled to their worship, but to be strangely near themselves. And when they came to the New Testament, there stood Jesus of Nazareth; and the closer men came to Him, the more His grandeur rose before them, and they 'beheld glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father.' Then they said, this is He of whom the Scriptures spoke. This is God, God in human form, God on earth just as there is God in heaven. And nothing helped them more to this than the way in which Jesus spoke of God. He claimed to be God's Son, and called God His Father. And when He would explain to men how Father stood to Son, He said, 'I and My Father are one.' But ere His departure from this earth, Jesus Himself spoke with extraordinary distinctness of the coming of another divine agent, who should take His place and carry on His work. And in very deed men found in themselves

working there with strange irresistible power, and producing results that eclipsed creation in the transformation of lives, something that exactly corresponded to Him of whom Jesus spoke, and they called this mighty worker within them God the Holy Spirit. And so it is not some strange concoction of the human brain that speaks when we call God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost one God, but it is just the description in a few words of what men who, as Christians, study the Bible and reflect on their own experience of salvation, find there about God,—who He is and what He is. And what gives it value and significance is that it satisfies our highest thoughts, finds room in God, through all eternity, for the play of the highest faculties man knows or possesses. Here is a God who is not blind energy, dumb force, an impersonal passionless unity. But within Himself there is room for fellowship, for love.

Now to the man who is asking, May I reckon myself a Christian? I would say: Is this your thought about God? Have you an intelligent grip of it? Does this conception of Him make any difference for you, or do you

understand the difference it does make in the life of men, and in their relation to God? Have you thought about it? Have you given it enough of attention to feel the perplexity, the puzzle of it? Have you thought enough to see where the solution is to be found, and how well worth finding it is. If you are a Christian you will have thought of it. If you are not, then you can only earn your right to remain as you are by careful thought; mere negligence again is wanton folly, wilful neglect.

III. Once more, Christians are men who hold certain convictions about the relations of man and God.

As put in a question asked in some churches of those joining the Church, it is stated thus: 'Do you acknowledge yourself to be by nature a sinner in need of salvation; and do you believe that salvation is only from the grace of God, through the obedience unto death of His Son Jesus Christ, and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost?' A Christian man says yes to that. Other people may believe what they like about humanity. They may theorise as they like about what has been; what may be possible; what ought

to be. They may glorify the faculties, the capacities, of man as they please. The Christian man knows this; that by nature he is a lost sinner. He knows that there is not a part of his nature which has not suffered through sin. He is not very much concerned about how this came about, who else is to blame, Adam, the Devil, heredity or environment. But he knows that he has done, and is, wrong, and that so far as he himself is concerned he is responsible for it. And what makes this appalling is that in spite of this conviction, in spite of aspirations after better things, in spite of good resolutions, he can do nothing to mend matters. He is helpless. And the Christian is not the only man who knows that. Every man, who really knows anything about God and man, knows it too. Every convicted sinner knows it. There are men and women who have never yet found Christ who are appalled and paralysed by the discovery of what they really are, and who wish they could be sure of a way of escape. What distinguishes the Christian from the others, is that he does know a way of escape, God's plan of salvation.

Over against his own helplessness and offensiveness, he places God's grace. Through Jesus Christ, God's Son, he has learnt the extraordinary, spontaneous kindliness and yearning towards men in the heart of God, what we call God's grace. He has found out that God loves him; why, he doesn't know, and his case was so desperate he does not wait to discover. It is enough to believe it on Christ's word and showing. The very presence of Christ, to say nothing of His Cross, vouches for it. But the Cross does more than guarantee God's interest. It expiates the guilt. Christ's suffering for sin discharges the debt. Christ's taking my place permits of my taking His. His perfect service is placed to the credit of every one who believes in Him, adheres to Him. There is pardon, there is restoration to right relation to God, in His Son. And then God the Spirit comes into us. His work begins. He works a radical transformation. He counteracts the depravity, the habit of going wrong. He gives a new heart and a right spirit, that tend upwards, climbing, like the ivy or the vine, by tendrils that bind to Christ, as steadily as did old habits tend downwards.

A Christian knows all that. Just as sight to a man born blind opens a new world to him, so the great, mighty faculty of faith, generated, quickened by the touch of Christ, has opened a new world, provided a new insight into the nature and relations of things, of man and God.

Now a man anxious to know whether he is a Christian or not should know something of all this. If he does not, it is not for want of means of information. This is the sum and substance of the gospel. This is the truth that lies open in the Bible. This is the message that is preached by every faithful minister of Jesus Christ. This is what parent, teacher, and pastor has above everything else been anxious he should learn, not only with the hearing of the ear but with the acceptance of the heart. It is not hard to know. It is all summed up in this, that God loved us; God gave His Son to die for us; God's spirit can make us holy. Salvation in all its parts comes from God.

IV. There remains the fourth mark. Christians have come into definite, personal relations with Jesus Christ. The relationship of the Christian to Jesus Christ is this. He believes

in Him as his Saviour, he acknowledges Him as his Lord and Master. And he promises to observe His Ordinances and obey His Laws, depending for strength to do it on the aids of the promised Spirit.

This is the crowning matter. Men may have a great respect for the Bible. They may be convinced that if there is a God, He must be, as the Christian says out of his experience, a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God. He may adopt the Christian view of the relations of man and God as those which most adequately explain the world in which they live. And yet men may not really be Christians, because they have never for themselves accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. They have, so to say, looked on and admired and approved, but they have never taken sides. Why? Ah, you may well say why. Let me be personal. You who are just in the position which I have described, can you tell me why? I don't believe you can. But there you are letting the precious privileges lie untouched, the precious moments of opportunity slip past unused. Why not take sides with Christ? Why not accept Him

as Saviour? Do you flatter yourself that you are the one exception, or that you are one of a large class, not so bad, who really do not need Him? You are not so foolish. You know you need a Saviour, and He is the only One who can save. And He is so eager, so anxious to do it, but will not infringe your liberty. You must take Him, if you want Him; and you need Him, whether you want Him or not. Or is it that you hesitate about His service, hesitate to call Him Lord, because you want to regulate your life by other laws and ordinances than His? No, you say. You prize the Sabbath. You prize the hours of public worship. You would like to come to His table. If you had a child you would like to have it baptized. You enjoy reading your Bible. You prize the privilege of prayer, and would like the right to pray with that assurance of a hearing and an answer which is theirs who pray in His name. You would gladly obey His laws, so simply summed up in the one word, Love. Then why not come out on His side? Are you uncertain of your ability to remain loyal? Have you forgotten the promised aids of His Spirit? If you

take His side these are guaranteed to you, and they are marvellous in their powers. What then hinders? You don't know. Is it not foolish? May it not be fatal, thus to hesitate, to hang back, to wait for something, you don't know what, to sweep you over in a wave of excitement into the ranks of Christ's confessed adherents and followers? That is where you wish, you intend, ultimately to be. It is in Him you hope ultimately to stand and be accepted at the great day of judgment. It is He that appeals to all that is best in you and impels you to anything that is right and laudable in your life. What keeps you from clear decision for Him and confession of it? It is just, let me tell you, an unworthy supineness, and want of will. And what you need to say to your hesitating, procrastinating self is, 'thou shalt hesitate no longer. I decide for Christ; that is my Will; Obey.'

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? HIS LIFE

'The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.'

LUKE.

## CHAPTER XV

### WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? HIS LIFE

WHAT is a Christian? In the previous chapter we considered what an unmistakable Christian believes. We shall look now at how an unmistakable Christian lives. And it has been truly said that 'for one man that cares what you believe there are ten who care what you do.' And what is more, you can only bear that testimony which is ultimately of much worth to Christian truth by living the Christian life, by being a Christian not in word only, but in deed and in truth. Not that the Creed is of no importance. It is of fundamental importance. You cannot get the Christian life without the Christian Creed. Attempts at it sooner or later utterly fail. But it is also equally certain and equally true that you cannot really hold the Christian Creed, be bound by the living ties of faith to Jesus Christ—whatever you may say about it

—without the Creed producing the life. So what is the Christian life?

I. The Christian life, to put it in one way, is an imitation of Christ.

Now what is an imitation of Christ? It is not a repetition line for line of the earthly experiences of Jesus. It is not spending a boyhood in Nazareth, an apprenticeship at a carpenter's bench, a busy three years in preaching the gospel, and ending the life on a Cross. That is no more what is meant by an imitation of Christ than the part played by the actor who fulfils Messiah's rôle at the Passion Play at Oberammergau. And the reason is just this, that an imitation of Christ is a matter not of the letter but of the spirit. Perhaps the best imitation of Christ that ever was given, was by Paul. But how unlike Christ's career was his in its externals! An imitation of Christ is an attempt to live our life as we imagine Christ would have lived, had He been placed in our circumstances. Suppose He had been, let us say with all reverence, a grocer, a baker, a railway guard, a schoolmaster, a lawyer, in our day, instead of a carpenter nineteen hundred years ago,

would He have managed His business as I manage mine? Am I imitating Christ in the way I treat the wholesale dealers, competitors in trade, customers, and the boys that run the errands? That is to say, Can I imagine Christ in my place and doing as I do? Can I imagine Him in my place, and am I doing as I feel sure He would have done there? I should be, if I am endeavouring to live the Christian life. I may be trying and not succeeding. The imitation may be a very poor one. Every day may challenge me with glaring discrepancies. But am I trying? Am I disappointed at the failures? Or am I quite content to go on, knowing all the while that Christ would never do this, Christ would never say that, which I do and say without a moment's hesitation, or even with a certain amount of pride? If that is so I have no right to the name Christian, for I am not the reality. It is the same about the home, about the street, about the hours of recreation and worship. A life that is an imitation of Christ will in these situations be such as His may be supposed to have been. Brothers, sisters, parents, and friends will be treated as He

would have treated them. A holiday will be spent as He might have spent it. The Sabbath, the Bible, the House of God, will be regarded as He regarded them. An imitation of Christ! Is my life the least like Christ's? Would anybody who knew nothing of Christ get any proper idea of what He thought, approved, condemned, avoided, practised, from seeing me? If I am really a Christian it should be so, for the Christian life is an imitation of Christ.

II. Again, the Christian life has certain fundamental laws and characteristics.

To say this is just to re-state the previous position in another way. But it may be worth while to notice some of those features. And to do so is just to note the prevailing features of the life of Christ, its regulating principles.

(*a*) There is faith, for instance. Now if we drop the theological way of talking, and take our lesson in faith from Christ and Scripture, what is it? I don't know that I ever found it better summed up than in Whittier's lines:

> 'Nothing before; nothing behind;
> The steps of Faith
> Fall on the seeming void, and find
> The rock beneath.'

Faith is just another word for the faculty of other-worldliness. Its great contrast is sight. This world as the real, the tangible, the stable, stands over against the unseen. And the wiseacres tell you, as with a knowing smile they make sure of it in £, s. d., in lands, and property, and social position, that 'seeing's believing.' No, says the Christian, it is the other way: Believing is seeing. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. Faith looks right through all at which the world's eye stops. Like some new penetrating spiritual Röntgen rays, it pierces the seeming solid, sufficient, substantial, sees through flesh and blood to the canker at the heart, and declines to spend its life on what after all is not lasting but fleeting. The life is more than meat and the body than raiment. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like a lily of the field. And says, a simple life, little bound to the faith mere externals of earthly existence, but dominated by regard for what will make men good, and kind, and truthful, that is the life worth living; that is the Christian life.

And more, there is only one force fit to secure for men the best there is in life, namely,

peace in the state, light in the home, and joy in the heart. That force is not wealth, social position, command of armies or of the sea. It is not brilliant genius in science, literature, philosophy, or art. 'It is the pure and unselfish moral force of really great men, namely fervid earnestness for truth, firm and steadfast aspirations after goodness.' Faith sees what one man of this type can do. It believes in Jesus, and such was He. What had He at His back to enable Him to effect the redemption of the world? 'Oh! a divine nature; legions of angels!' Yes, but did He use them? He relied on means within the reach of any man. He was dominated by a strong sense of individual responsibility. He depended on the influence of a character, steeped in spirituality. And when a man anxious to use his life to the best advantage comes to Jesus and says his gifts are small, he is friendless and has no position or influence, and the needs of the world are overwhelming; what are his five loaves and two fishes among so many; Jesus just says again, 'bring them to Me.' And one man with confidence enough in Jesus to do that, may accomplish anything.

We cannot make too much of this element in the Christian life, Faith. It is that grip of God, that consciousness of His constant presence that makes a man hold lightly by the things of time, care little about money, lands, public notice and approval, whether he has them or no, just because he has God, he has Christ, and that is everything.

(*b*) Another distinctive mark of the Christian life is regard for truth. There are more than the Christian who set high store by truth. But that does not belittle its importance for the Christian life. It enhances it. Much as men do appreciate it, do you know what Emerson says somewhere? 'There is nothing astonishes men more than common-sense and plain dealing.' And what is plain dealing but truth in action? And if you want evidence of the truth of what he says, look at Pilate. There never was a judge left so utterly at a loss, so unable to know what to make of his prisoner, unable to decide whether he was crazy or noble beyond all praise, as was Pilate met by the pleadings of Jesus. 'Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world,

to bear witness unto the Truth. Every one that is of the Truth heareth My voice.' For one thing it was in blank astonishment that Pilate replied: 'What is Truth?' It was a new experience to him to meet one who was really in earnest about the claims of truth, a transparently simple-hearted, honest man.

Truth takes those two forms: Truth of word and thought, or sincerity; Truth of act, or conscientiousness. Sincerity and conscientiousness, what are they? A sincere man is a man who loves the truth, whatever it is, for its own sake, and at once hails and admits it. What he believes to be the truth he holds firmly and fearlessly, and regulates his life by it. What he believes to be the truth may be a mistake. Prove that to him, and a sincere man will at once admit it. Some men are born that way. If the man that becomes a Christian was not born that way, it is one of the fruits of the Spirit he must at once, as a loyal adherent of Jesus Christ, set himself to cultivate. Your obstinate, shifty hedger and prevaricator, an adept at excuses and subterfuges, belies his name if he calls himself

Christian. A Christian is a man of the truth. More than that, this love of truth comes out in his conduct. He is a conscientious man. We cannot exaggerate the importance of conscientiousness. I am free to say that there is no more attractive quality in a workman. He may be slow; he may lack brilliancy—although neither the one nor the other necessarily accompanies conscientiousness. But when his work is done it will bear the most minute examination. What was done unsuperintended is as good as what was done under the employer's eye. And why? He does his work for another Master than any man. He always works in the sight of God. He could not be a sloven. He could not be listless over his daily work, with his hands at the chisel or the pen and his mind on the play or the links, or even on the things of the Spirit. Just as little could he force success by recklessness or unscrupulousness. He is answerable to God. He is an honest man.

(*c*) One feature more, namely Love. What can one say about Love? And yet there is nothing so essentially and characteristically Christian as Love. And as Paul shows us in

1 Corinthians xiii., the greatest thing in Christianity as a theory of life is the place it gives to love, and the greatest Christian discovery about Great Love is this: its capacity to infuse and transform every other virtue and excellence and raise it to a new level and worth. Isn't it amazing, 'Charity, Love, suffereth long and is kind, charity envieth not,' and so on? I might quote the whole familiar chapter. Can all that be said of any other virtue? Can that be said of any other conception of love than Christian love? Can a living example of that character be discovered in any one but Jesus Christ, or any approximation to it except in men who have tasted most deeply of the love of Christ to them? This is something essentially Christian. And a loveless Christian is a contradiction in terms.

Now if a man is a Christian, love will show itself in his life in some of these ways. (i) In dealing with all classes it will appear as self-forgetfulness. The thing a Christian man does not do is look after number one. It takes a long time to reach perfection in that. Self is so insidious. I remember a man telling of the

best Christian he had ever known. This man, he said, had mastered self in every direction but one. He was a keen angler, and if you went to fish with him you found that he always made sure of the best pools for himself! Slight, but significant of how hard it is, even for a good man, to master self. (ii) Love again takes the shape of considerateness. That is the other side of self-forgetfulness, namely thought for others, for their feelings, for their likes and dislikes, for their needs and difficulties. It means skill and imagination in putting oneself in another's place. But love and a little thought can do it. And there is no way in which Christianity can show itself more conspicuously and unobtrusively—and Christianity to win adhesion needs to be at once conspicuous and unobtrusive—in the circle of friends and of the home, than just by considerateness and thought for others. (iii) Towards the erring love comes out in forbearance and forgiveness. Firmness, strictness, supervision may be necessary. But an unforgiving disposition is utterly alien to Christ. Indeed He says so in so many words: 'If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly

Father forgive you.' An unforgiving Christian is as much an impossibility as an infidel Christian. A Christian is a man who forgives injuries and wrongs; a man who does not, is not a Christian. They are mutually exclusive. And a resentful, touchy, suspicious nature, that bears grudges and cherishes spites, is sulky, sullen, and slow to forget a slight, discredits the man's whole profession and casts a slur on the cause to which he professes to adhere. (iv) There is hopefulness too. A bright Christian life is worth a great deal. How much it is worth to others I never realised till lately. For myself I take a hopeful view of things, even at the worst. And it is a great relief to oneself to look at things generally in that way. But I have discovered that it makes a difference to others. I got a letter from a poor soul not long ago in the depths of spiritual darkness and woe: 'I feel that I am in hell,' it said. And why was it written to me? Because, the writer said, 'you always seemed so cheery.' I hope what I wrote in reply helped. But is not that an illustration of the worth of a merry heart. And it is Christ's love in the heart that makes it really bright. And if Christians want

other men to believe in their Christianity they must cultivate hopeful love. It is a mark of the Christian life.

III. A third way of describing the Christian life is this. It is a harmony. That, of course, is suggested by what we have just seen of the pervasive character of Christian love. The Christian life is a whole. It is not a case of

> 'Compounding for sins we are inclined to
> By damning those we have no mind to.'

It is not to be a lop-sided affair. There are few sights more pitiable than a misshapen fellow-creature. It may be man or woman, and worth of character or brilliance of genius may compensate for bodily deformity; but for all that, as far as the body is concerned, it lacks attractiveness. So with the Christian life. It loses its attractiveness when it is not symmetrical, when only one grace is developed, or when one quality is cultivated at the expense of the others. It was a wise man who when he had commended faith went on to say, 'add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godli-

ness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity, for if these things be in you and abound they shall make you to be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.' So let it be. Christian men must cultivate the whole round of Christian graces. They must not let faith be nullified by want of charity, or love be sapped of moral energy and degenerate into sentimentalism. If they are valiant for truth, they must speak the truth in love. If they are generous and liberal, they must see that they are just and honest to begin with. None must be content to be a righteous man, just to a degree, but wanting in geniality. To be good is the ideal. A Christian is a Christ-like man. And Christ was perfect in every grace.

IV. But this also must not be overlooked. The Christian life is a life fostered by and exhibited in simple piety.

As we have seen, the Christian life is not a matter of the cloister, of a particular class, or a particular day. It is not embodied in a set of observances. It is not a life of monks and nuns, or members of an order, brotherhood, or sisterhood. It is not the life of the clergyman

or the missionary. It is not a thing of Sabbaths, Sundays, or High Festivals, observance of hours of devotion and holy communion. It is rather a flavour, a savour, imparted into every type of human life. Domestic life, business life, the life of the mechanic, of the politician, of the professional man, may each become the Christian life by the infusion into them of that regard for God, consecration to the welfare of our fellows, detachment from and yet interest in the things of time, which uses them as material on which to build up a holy character,—features which were all so characteristic of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Example.

But the Christian man is a devout man. The Christian man is one who knows that to live the Christian life he needs his times of fellowship with God. He needs his times for meditation on God's Word and prayer, secret prayer. He knows his family circle should be linked together in united worship, and he reads with them and prays with them. He knows that public worship is essential for keeping men in touch with one another on the great matters of religious truth and duty. He knows that his own life and the Christian life

of the community depend on these things for being watered and nourished and developed. And he takes full advantage of them, is jealous for their honour. He is not ashamed to uphold them, to ask a blessing, say, on his food, or to check profanity. He is not ashamed to decline to engage in a course of conduct that promises great material advantages, for no other reason than that it is at variance with his duty to his neighbour as he has learnt that from Christ, or with his duty to his God. He is not morose, censorious, discourteous, unsociable, or opposed to learning or art. He loves the joyous, the friendly, the beautiful. But he has no relish for, has an instinctive repugnance to, everything that is tainted with the suggestion of evil, or that blurs the sharp distinctions between right and wrong, pure and impure, sacred and irreverent. And he cannot help making men feel that. He grows wearied of the hollow pretences, the false liberalism, by which timid souls play fast and loose with hallowed things, the Bible, the Day of Rest, the House of God, or seek to safeguard them by worldly pleas, in place of honestly telling the world that if it does not want them, let it

say so, 'but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.' He says, 'we need these, and we will keep these, and we will do all we can to secure them for others, for they need them too, need them more than anything else to keep the spirit of the community pure and healthy. The Christian is a devout man. He lives every hour of the day in the atmosphere of God, of prayer, of the Spirit.

These, then, are the marks of the Christian life. And any man who professes to be a Christian must exhibit the marks. For a man who is not a Christian to become one, it is not sufficient for him to adopt and profess a creed; he must begin to regulate his life by the Christian principles, fashion it after the pattern exhibited by Christ. And how much this is needed in the present day! To say nothing of its value for the maintenance of the sweetness of home life, for the purifying of all social intercourse, for the upholding of the integrity and probity of commercial and industrial relations, and for the commending of Christianity in these spheres, there are social problems pressing for solution—housing of the poor, suppression of drunkenness, staying of the plague of

gambling and impurity, adjustment of fiscal and international relations, religious education, and so on. But how do men try to deal with them? By societies, by committees, by inquiries, and so on. In truth, there is but one cure for the evils, one solution for the problems. Let professing Christians act as Christians, individually, conspicuously, determinedly; and things will right themselves, in spite of the most adverse conditions. Let Christians be Christians, in buying and in selling, their walk, their talk, and their work; let doubters become believers, and live their lives by the laws of Christ; and Earth will soon be Paradise Regained.

Printed by T. and A. Constable, Printers to His Majesty
at the Edinburgh University Press